

PNR: La Bella Vita

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I'm Don

and I don't feel angry anymore.

I used to think I needed to feel angry, that it was the petrol in my tank, helping me get through life.

It gave me that fierce Pitbull attitude inside and out that made people even much bigger than me back off.

Like some artists keep off meds so they don't put out their creative fire, I always thought I'd shrivel up into nothing without my anger.

And now –

I don't feel angry anymore.

I don't despise the world I live in or the people, who, I guess, aren't afraid of me anymore.

They look at me and see a young person who stopped growing at five foot nothing, who's harmless. I reckon that's all anyone thinks when they clock me. And maybe that's all there is to think, too.

I never made plans, I thought they were for suckers. There could be a world war tomorrow, and then I'd need different skills, other than talking to myself. Digging trenches and stuff, to mention just one activity that's necessary in a world war. People who see themselves doing this or that, or living here or there in ten years, are sad. I don't even know how I'll feel tomorrow.

When I wasn't feeling right, I'd always *do* something so the world would leave me in peace. Ran away from home as a kid and crashed with other angry kids. Did a whole bunch of things that upstanding citizens wouldn't do. Citizens who believe in the system, that is.

But I never believed in it. And it never believed in me.

I never expected much from life.

That's a brilliant sentence. Sounds like it's said by a single mum with ten kids, in her kitchen all on her own, wearing a stained apron and wistfully stroking her varicose veins.

And now, I live in the nicest country in the world and live a life that seems too nice to be mine. Every morning, I'm amazed to be so lucky.

This is my recording of events, and it starts now.

0.

We're living in the time after the Revolution.

It's bonkers.

That there's still a thing called time,

or human life,

because there *was* no alternative to capitalism, isn't that what they used to say?

After it, there'd only be black holes ready to swallow up the world, not even leaving crumbs that could be spit out into space.

The old system's dead, and there's no new one.

So they said.

As if new social systems lie in storage, and you just have to shake 'em out to use them.

Over the past couple of years, when capitalists tried to arm themselves against the collapse of the stock markets,

when people were too exhausted to try anything at all, let alone come up with a new vision, they just carried on.

The capitalists, who turned into oligarchs because they owned the world, carried on too, resorting to ever stranger moves, but everyone else just moved through life like they were on remote control.

It wasn't that bad. They were still alive. Kind of.

They had forgotten how to live without fear because fear had been the petrol in their tanks that had powered them through multiple crises.

It was

the time of massive assaults on any sense of well-being. And everybody thought that material fatigue was the only thing there was.

But now – everything's still up and running, almost.

Except.

A few stock markets, banks and NATO headquarters have

disappeared. Along with a few digital billionaires. And former royal families and dynasties are now chilling on islands near their offshore companies.

All it took was a little anarchistic oomph, a well-thought-out plan, and the system with no alternative was gone, poof, practically overnight.

Imploded, brought to its knees, curtains. See ya!

It's as simple as that when people decide not to reboot the system, not to keep things running with each new day, with their lives and work that they do for some faceless person rather than for themselves.

So they can buy substitute lives to compensate for selling their own.

Something new had to come.

Enjoy!

1. In recognition of the dignity of every sentient being, and in the spirit of mutual help, free association and the rejection of every form of power, we hereby declare the constitution of the Free Communes.

Lotta continua, as the Italians say.

It's almost still night, barely any colour, that intermediate phase when you're hardly conscious of your body, and have no ego or desire. A perfect condition as long as predators aren't trying to figure out the world, or to act as if they had it figured out.

When they're like this, they're tolerable – horizontal and spouting nonsense, soaking their pillows in little lakes of dribble, in which bacteria paddle around on stand-up boards.

Just when I'm about to embrace the world with love, the sounds of morning sports begin.

Groaning noises that people make to draw attention to their disciplined lives. This urge to *feel* your body first thing in the morning is alien to me. I'm grateful for every minute I *don't* have to feel mine – no pain, no twitching muscles, no signs of the fleetingness of existence.

Not so long ago, everybody had to wear surveillance armbands that tracked whether they did enough exercise and pushed themselves to the limit. If not, they were barred from telemedicine services.

So just die, then.

Today, people *could* indulge in the luxury of a gentle start to the day – but once again, some people are already chomping at the bit, impatient to subject themselves to their own dictatorship.

The groaning merges with the vague terror my dream has left behind. It's the dream – or possibly a kind of reality based on an incomprehensible physical theory – that

people exist parallel to one another in different time periods. And it's recurring. Every few days, I wake myself up by choking on my tears.

Or by my own sobbing.

Let me quickly tell you about it, yeah? Everyone loves being told other people's dreams. Just kidding. I can't think of anything more boring than hearing snippets of someone's night-time thoughts in hallucinogenic colours. But you, dear listeners, have decided to come with me on my journey into the beginnings of a new world. You only have yourselves to blame.

So here goes.

Karen, Hannah, Pjotr and me.

We stick together.

WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN HERE. We four from the council tower blocks, the trash kids, the traumatised child soldiers. Karen, the intellectual of the group, tried to sterilise every man in London with adenoviruses, but that noble experiment failed. She later studied biochemistry or whatever the hell it was. Pjotr or Peter – he always called himself different names depending on how strongly he felt he belonged to his old Polish or new British . . . I almost said home country – was the autistic of the group. He'd been abandoned by his mother at the age of six because she'd met a rich man who didn't want kids. Hannah is the woman everyone falls in love with straight away. Her mother got caught in gang crossfire in Liverpool and died, and her father followed shortly afterwards, egged on by one of those sadistic suicide apps.

And me. Let's not talk about me, I hate it.

We all took revenge on everyone who'd tortured us as children. The app developers, Pjotr's mum, the Russians, my sadistic stepfather, and Karen's rapist: we brought them all to justice. To put it mildly. We survived bullies, sadists, the

British government, surveillance fascists and a Revolution, and we'll probably always be each other's chosen family. And –

Now it's here,
out of the blue.

The accident, the moment that changed everything.

The moment nobody believed could happen, the moment when the system was eradicated, or what they called “living conditions”.

An exception – people were able to feel for others, their suffering, their endless paralysis.

It's all gone, they whispered.

Their world has come crashing down.

Gone, the homes made of bricks and people, the people who made you feel real, who gave you the edges of your world, a contour, a status among random billions.

There's only safety in routine, something stable you can count on in this fragile life, with all the rifts in the world that each of us creates, and that will never heal.

The damaged world continues to spin, brightens and darkens again, over and over, and generations will be born who have never known crazy generals, or the wars over land and power, or the arms industry, religion, hatred, delusion—

This short, sad life, in which everything that allows us to breathe is so fragile.

How can we bear this uncertain existence if we can't believe in a meaning to it all, or that everything's going to be OK again, and that we'll meet again in a better place? Where we could be infinite in this wonderful uniqueness, each and every one of us.

We give ourselves a shake and feel relieved – we've been spared.

Buildings gutted by fire, parks laid to waste, ruined by drought.

I say it's like –

Don't say *like in a film*, says Hannah.

Then I'll just shut up. We walk through streets strewn with pets dead from thirst, ripped-up pictures, destroyed fountains, statues, and Birkenstock sandals, all artefacts of an advanced, umm, we-ell – civilisation.

It looks like an empty kitchen where the people have run away, leaving behind soup still steaming in bowls before the lava seeps into their rooms.

Karen talks to herself. Everyone talks to themselves these days; we can't hear each other.

Over there are the remains of server farms, still operating on inexhaustible hydro or solar power, from a sun that feels like it is scorching the surface of things even first thing in the morning. That's where all the secrets are stored, the accumulated knowledge and experience of wearables, information from Siri, Alexa, trackers, biometric cameras and nanobots that lived in people's brains. The Revolution did not work, says Karen.

Doesn't look like it, says Peter.

Four years of preparation, thousands of nerds, plans that ranged from the abolition of the euro to the conversion of army barracks. And it was all for nothing. I think.

A few gadgets seem to still be buzzing, and a few birds. Somehow, there are always birds. And then I wake up.

2. Every person has the right to secure housing. It is the duty of the residents to manage and maintain their living space.

I think back to the day after the Revolution, like I always do when I want to get into a good mood, like I'm the Queen of the World. The day

people stepped into the light like chimpanzees released from a lab, leaving the dungeon of their research facility for the first time.

Incredible.

No one had thought the system could simply be abolished.

How could they? Their brains were hacked by football, scandals, inflation and disasters, and it was all stirred up into one big crisis, conjuring up the apocalypse in all the media and spreading mass panic with all those handwringing speeches by politicians.

And no one had a clue what to do.

Despite all the approved demonstrations and people sticking themselves to pavements in front of buildings, despite the strikes and feeling helpless, these were all just symptoms. What we needed was accommodation, more money, lower prices, more doctors, more hospitals, more greenery, less fear, more animal welfare, ecological welfare, human welfare, more migrants, fewer people, abortions or a ban on them, every gender, or to do away with them all.

Only a few people were heretical enough to think up a different kind of society to replace the Infinite Jest of consumerism.

Only a handful wanted to make the past great again, with the aid of weapons, body bags and slaked lime. Their ideal world was a pub that served sausages. And after that, they just wanted to go home, where wifey would've been slaving over a hot stove since the early morning. Unresponsive, but that wasn't the point. The point was: she was by the stove.

Others spoke about democratic processes. Oh yeah, let's take to the streets for democracy after filing our organised discontent with the authorities and being sanctioned to express it.

It's all about small reforms. Could we please possibly consider taking back the one per cent from the billionaires who previously stole it from the majority? And if acceptable, could we please possibly invest it in kindergarten places? Or in education? Yes, education for – oh, never mind.

Or in organic farms and self-sufficient households? Oh, and by the way, people, voting is cool, elections are democracy!

If you come and vote, there'll be a leftie rock band playing, rhyming liberty with –

Come on, you know this!

Equality, exactly. Totally worth fighting for – I'll just post a slogan online. There you go, you Pentagon-funded tech bro, that's *my* protest!

And then there are the baby steps you can take for democracy, like “Separating Your Garbage for Freedom” and hammering a solar panel to your balcony. What's that? You don't have a balcony because you live in a cellar? Congratulations! You're already living a consciously minimalist life.

All those rousing talks, all those anti-capitalist books, films, documentaries, speeches, and campaigns can be summarised in Simple English that only takes 0.003 seconds to read. Okay, we know that capitalism ultimately leads to our decimation by capitalists to give them more room to play golf, but –

Sorry, what's that?

Uh-huh, right.

That's what everyone thought before they turned back to their outrage on the internet.

But the system – to come back to that big, nebulous nothing-word – the social order that occupied every brain, didn't leave a single cell free to imagine an alternative that wasn't tied to scratchy wool pullovers or life in a caravan commune.

The trickle-down economy wasn't just excellent for a handful of billionaires. With the aid of shares, IT jobs, and job descriptions with the word 'supervisor' somewhere, a new caste of business-class travellers was born. A bit like the former middle class, but wealthier. They chartered yachts with sets of colleagues, owned real estate, not just to live in but to rent to tourists via online platforms. Tough shit, locals!

Normal people could afford a holiday in flats advertised on such platforms, have food delivered and buy new knitwear. Their old clothes were tossed in the garbage, and at Christmas, they sometimes travelled elsewhere to buy knitwear on sale with other tourists.

Poverty was always someone else's problem, far, far away or in some dark flat on the edge of town. But hey, a flat's a flat. Everyone was dreaming of a democracy that had meaning and perhaps something along the lines of wellness – in other words, a PR-agency invention.

They were dreaming of decent governments that would eventually come to power and secure wealth for the middle classes.

And they did come. They were a little bit fascist, but you can't have everything.

In the end, nearly every country in Europe had a more or less reactionary, fascist, conservative, libertarian, entrepreneur-friendly government that cultivated the well-being of the little people (under one metre fifty) in Simple English with good solutions.

And now, in the middle of this wonderful review of events, the sun hits me right between the eyes. It's going to be a wonderful day today. I'll be seeing my family again!

3. Housing must never be used to increase the wealth of individuals or for speculation.

I live in the Monument to Victor Emmanuel II, a cute building if you're into marble horses. Think of it as a chick magnet's pad, immortalised in marble, and you'll have the right idea.

Cue attractive, toned women squealing, *OMG, you live in the Monument to Victor Emmanuel II!* and begging me for a tour around the place.

This place is amazing, they then say, stretching out on my bed.

There they lie, dozens of imaginary, striking beauties, just waiting to be seduced by me. After some unforgettable lovemaking, some of them stay, and we end up living together. We make love, keep dogs, cook spaghetti in the evenings, swim in the pool, drive down to the beach, play ball games – and we're always naked.

I didn't choose this building because I have a soft spot for over-the-top buildings crammed with tons of marble. It's more about the fleeting feeling of triumph I get – me, the slum kid – when I walk through this palace every day with its square-kilometre-long interiors and exteriors, or scoot up and down the grand staircases, or make speeches from the balustrade on the terrace, and so on.

This marble eyesore was one of Il Duce's pet projects because in it, he saw the expression of his own power. It has enough space to house seventy-eight gigantic statues of Cylops. When the Americans ended fascism and then communism, weary hordes of tourists shuffled across these light marble floors. Many died and were never found in the hidden depths of the building. This monstrosity is seventy metres high, one hundred and thirty-five metres wide, and one hundred thirty metres deep. Its cries for attention drown out all the surrounding buildings.

Since the Revolution, the monument has been converted, like thousands of other pointless buildings in Europe. People now inhabit spaces that were once monuments, memorials, banks, stock markets, insurance offices, advertising and

PR agencies, Secret Service buildings, prisons, car showrooms, arms storerooms, embassies, branches of Black Rock and military bases.

Most of these buildings were constructed with the Italians' tax money on their land. People paid for their maintenance, for the streets leading to them, for renovations, surveillance, the gardens . . . And so, it's only right that stoned teenagers now party on the roofs of the secret service offices.

My flat costs one hundred lire. It used to be one hundred euros. We had to fundamentally rethink all those beautiful currencies, uncoupled from oil, guilt, stock markets and America. The revolutionary financial factions, under the leadership of a Swiss central banker, had given back the old currencies to every country in Europe. They smell so wonderfully nostalgic, these old banknotes – but they too will disappear in one or two generations when people are finally prepared to do without money.

Like all residents, my 100 lire goes towards renovations, the upkeep of the flats, garden work, pool maintenance, child and patient care. Everyone who lives in multi-occupancy buildings contributes to some kind of housework. Some repair things, others clean the stairwell or change lightbulbs, and most are happy to do so because the buildings belong to us.

To make sure everything runs in an orderly fashion – because people love rules and clear instructions – the right to affordable housing, which forbids all kinds of speculation, has been written into the constitution, just in case a desire for it should ever arise again. Before the Revolution, the right to the nationalisation of companies existed in many constitutions, if it served the public good. We could have ended poverty without the Revolution, but people's fear of losing the sanctity of their homes and ending up on the streets had made them very quiet, and we were all subject to property owners' harassment. Like turning off the heating and only having cold water in winter – well, at least there was water – or garbage piling up, no renovation or repairs, and all those other things that increased shareholders' profits.

What will people now do with so much free time, since their lives before revolved around owning more and amassing capital and wealth, because *more* was always *good*? It made you immortal.

And the people — the ones who had borne the brunt of the last unregulated system — went along with it. They voted for parties that promised survival, paid small sums into pension funds that invested in real estate and displaced small savers from their rented flats, and blamed refugees — or homosexuals — for everything.

And now —

People haven't become better humans overnight. They just do better things, and perhaps this outward change has led to an inward one, too.

Cue screaming.

Downstairs in front of the building, children are probably jumping into the pool, and my neighbours are probably coming out of their flats and saying good morning. Everyone is always checking fearfully if everything is still there.

Perhaps a motorway slip road or data centres have been constructed overnight, but

Luckily not.

I hear them talking about how they slept, whether they were too hot or too cold. They talk about their families, the children, their new lives and their intrepid living situation.

The flats hang in the gigantic halls like beehives. There are slides down from the top floor, paternosters, intricate staircases, and balconies inside and out. The interior design seems to be based on children's drawings from a distant future.

Built from fungus-and-wood-waste bricks, the housing hives incorporate structural elements salvaged from ruins.

We could have done this in the past, too.

We didn't have to sheathe the world in concrete, or build blocks made of glass and concrete along asphalt streets where stunted trees and shrubs were trapped – we didn't need asphalt or motorways all the way into the city at all. But that would not have been profitable.

Now this mess has to be cleaned up. The concrete towers have to be rewilded, and the palaces have to be converted for people to live in.

You can see this in my own building very well. After some large-scale re-greening projects were carried out, the kilometre-long stone terraces, staircases, and galleries are almost fit for human beings again. Inner and outer spaces have been turned into a small village by adding cafés, pools, and kiosks, a bar, club rooms, workshops, kindergartens, and a restaurant.

The architectural arc stretches from opulent fin-de-siècle marble to a Mad Max dreamscape that looks like it's been crocheted. It's an oasis of beauty for people who like things DIY-style. There are planted car tyres for a top garden aesthetics, hanging macramé pots that speak to pallet sofas, and over at the back, a marble plinth covered in finger paint.

In the brief lifetime of the new social order, the residents of Rome have managed to transform their city from a tourist hotspot in permanent decline into something resembling the stage set of an amateur theatre group in a squatted hippie village.

Construction works and conversions are going on all over the place, and the city has become an expression of the euphoria with which people are launching into a unique experiment –

The survival of the species.

4. Believe whatever you like

In the neighbouring flat, young men are busy trying to invent a solar-powered aircraft. Now and again, you can hear it crash-landing on the surface of the pool. The invention clearly needs fine-tuning.

Perhaps the two men are considering sending their autonomous aircraft to the settlement on Mars.

Talking of which –

Little of the great progress promised in the last decades materialised. Air taxis, hyperloops, teleportation, life on Mars or underwater, friendly robots that do the washing up – these became machines that replaced humans, or turned into AI that replaced thinking with code and consumed the energy of several countries. All this digitalisation forced people to become the administrators of their own lives. And when people realised that their belief in a bright future had become a reality that was turned against them, it was too late.

Now all these things have disappeared: transatlantic cables, cryptocurrency, iPhone wallets, social score points, telemedicine, surveillance cameras, radio masts, data centres, social media, push notifications, the eighty-nine different ring and messenger tones, cities and construction sites and the traffic jams and tooting horns, all of which added up to a *Gesamtkunstwerk* of auditory overload. And nobody seems to miss this manifestation of progress.

In our newfound peace, people do arts and crafts again, glueing, screwing and sawing things as if markets were never necessary as drivers of human development.

I rarely felt that urge to enrich the world with things of my own making. All I wanted was – actually, nothing. Except to live free of pain or fear. I am and always have been surrounded by people who want to save the world, or at least to explore and understand it, but it was enough for me to live off their purpose in life.

Now that the sun is higher, the ceiling shines with rich-people-spots, the kind you get created when the sun reflects off water.

Pools are an important building block for social happiness.

Alongside helicopters and caviar, they were the epitome of what the working classes used to think was capital. Nearly everyone thought that if they just put in the effort and followed all the rules, they too would eventually be the proud owners of a pool.

By the end of their lives, most were happy just to own a bed, while a handful of others had a blow-up paddling pool at the back of their fully mortgaged, terraced house.

Envy – that burning sensation in the pit of your stomach that comes from feeling hard done by – was the root of all the pointless spending, phat cars and ridiculous curtains. It was to blame for all the stabbings, screaming, burning asylum-seeker homes, murder, manslaughter and riots. It led to stomach ulcers, halitosis and vulgar expression.

I know all about envy because I invented it.

It gobbled me up at an age when I didn't even know the word for that feeling, it grew,

when I was waiting with my mother in Rochdale at the food bank for losers, while decent children drove past in clean cars with decent parents. When they looked at me in disgust – or that's what I thought I saw in their expressions – the way people look at rats, I could hardly breathe for the hatred I felt. While I sat on the top bunk of my bed in my jogging bottoms and socks, eating beans out of the tin, the good kids slept soundly in houses with fireplaces, in their own rooms, surrounded by woollen blankets and toys, eating biscuits, cake, custard and great big chunks of meat, from the moment they woke up to the moment they went to bed, sometimes even as they sleepwalked. I envied everything other people had: their confidence,

woollen jumpers, food, bikes and that feeling of security I felt for the first time four years ago.

Today, I only envy couples.

There's only one thing that's worse: couples with dogs.

And perhaps people who are one metre ninety. And chess prodigies.

And people who can get up in the morning quicker than I can.

In the past, the loneliness felt by European people was so great that governments organised project weeks against loneliness. I remember this when I look at my feet that are getting further and further away from the rest of my body. Balloons were distributed to depressed and lonely people who sat around in a circle, ate cake, and then carried on being lonely.

What else could be expected back then, when there was no post office, no bank, no cinemas or theatres where you might see other people. When your entire life took place online, alone, on a sofa that had already merged with your own flesh, what else could be the result except loneliness? People sat alone in their flats and stroked end-user devices.

Now they sit on blankets by the rivers, ponds and creeks that used to be buried under the cement.

I could go swimming before work, I could walk energetically and powerfully past the gymnastic group to the main entrance and from there, dive smoothly headfirst into the pool from one of the balconies.

Then I'd change my clothes, and fall over because I'd be balancing on one leg, and my naked arse would stick up in the air. The neighbours would stare at me. There, just look at that, it's the arse of a foreigner, someone not from around here, they'd say. Because I don't belong with all these loud, goofy, good-looking people. I don't know which songs they sang as children, I don't know the different types of food here or what they mean. I don't know their insider jokes, TV stars or their national scandals. I have no idea about their – how do you call it? – culture. Their traditions,

slang, what places and people stand for, or their prejudices. I'm just a tourist, an observer, a newcomer, and I'll always stay that way because a person loses the right to their so-called home country as soon as they move away from where they were born. Only natives can make jokes about their home country and know where evil resides –

My home country is Rochdale, a draughty city where it constantly drizzles, with its tower blocks, and all-pervasive misery of betting and charity shops, and its lack of greenery. And its lack of hope.

The fear of being found out as a foreigner is based on the terrible fear of being sent home again.

[END OF SAMPLE]