

Synopsis of “Buy St Agnes Fountain”

A local Clerkenwell teenage girl asks her older sister about some comments a Muslim friend made at school about what Christians believe. Her sister recalls the views of a secular humanist she knows. The girl goes to bed and has a dream...

The Managing Director of Abdullah Developments wants to build an office block on Clerkenwell Green. The Chief Executive of Islington Council will have none of it. He arranges to have the area landscaped, and a fountain built with his name engraved upon it. He falls out with his mistress over her interest in the Managing Director's proposals, and sacks her and her Muslim colleague, who becomes the step-father of the baby she is carrying.

A generation passes and the baby is now a woman in her late twenties called Agnes. Agnes is about to marry Peter, who has fallen for her despite having his proposal to build a shopping mall around the fountain on the Green rejected by her. Agnes celebrates her hen night with her girlfriends around the fountain and then tries to make her new husband understand the way she sees the world. A number of encounters with local people reveal some of the tensions that exist between her and her friends. Then suddenly, she is called to the bedside of a young friend of hers who has been pronounced dead, and astonishes the doctor and her parents by reviving her.

The event is reported as a sensation in the local newspaper. A sceptical journalist from a national newspaper interviews Agnes. He discovers that she is a Muslim, a local planning officer, and the child of the Chief Executive who set up the fountain on the Green. He publishes an article which quotes her as intending to resist the building of a mosque on the Green, as she is opposed to the state-sponsored “establishment” of Islam of which this is a part. The article causes consternation in Agnes' husband and friends, who urge her to stick to local interests, and not to prejudice them by getting involved in national issues.

Agnes regretfully decides that she must stand up for what she believes in spite of the likely cost. The Editor of the national newspaper is hauled over the coals by the Secretary of State and his Permanent Under-Secretary for publishing the article. One of Agnes' friends goes to see the Editor with material for a further article, in the hope that this will cut Agnes down to size again. The Editor publishes an article which leads to Agnes' arrest for treason and blasphemy under new laws which have accompanied the islamisation programme. Agnes says very little at her trial before the Lord Chief Justice and her appeal for mercy before the King and his Privy Council, except to assert that Muslims must submit to no man in place of God. She is sentenced to death by stoning, and the fountain is blown up on top of her.

The girl whom Agnes revived sings a lament over the pile of rubble. Miraculously, Agnes emerges unscathed from the rubble and embraces her. The dream ends...

The girl reports the gist of the dream to her sister over breakfast next morning. Her sister comments that Agnes sounds like a saint. The girl asks if Muslims can be saints.