

A stolen moment, a day apart, an opportunity for **Pawn** to shed those hauntings, those naggings, those things that go bump in the night...the wild things. Those voiceless spirits, alive with whimsy, which operate on the fringes of his awareness, but, like Poltergeists, interfere with his sleep, his mornings, his pace of life. A day away, a respite, a train ride, to be sure, but a magic carpet, as well...

That is what it was to have been, but, alas, **Pawn** never has things so easy. No, this is a capitalistic enterprise, we cannot escape that. And so, **Pawn** will find that his hauntings continue, unabated, but at least a good win can wash away the doubt which may otherwise gnaw away at his psyche. This is a vacation, but from what...this is yet to be seen.

Pawn may rest, but he will not relax. Not yet.

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Oh joy, a day at the races. An inspiration of X which came early in the planning process. Off early to Kempton Park for a full day of races on Bank Holiday Family Day. First, though, a couple of explanations. FAQ No. 1: What the Dickens is a "Bank Holiday"? Simple, a bank holiday is a "statutory" holiday, one put there by the books. England does not have many saint's days or national hero days; they have veteran's day and Boxing day (St. Stephen's day) and a few others, but unlike the US, there is no Thanksgiving or 4th of July or President's day, etc. (big shock, that). So, they have instituted the Bank Holiday system, whereby the government declares that certain dates will be Bank Holidays, always on a Monday, and this makes for convenient three day weekends, often perfectly placed for the merchants to hold sales, holiday resorts to book events, etc.

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FAQ No. 2: Family day at a race track? Are you serious?!? Yes, this is for real. Our best guess was that this was a subterfuge for dedicated betters to go on doing so even on a bank holiday. In reality, it is something entirely different. As we found, and as you will see in the photos, there are lots of real families there, with lots and lots of kids, and they have all sorts of fun with face painting, balloon animals, parleys, perfectas and exactas.

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[And impromptu lessons in equine anatomy, enjoyed by young and old; a truly "teachable moment".- X]

Here, then, is the order of the day:

Rain - on and off, and cool, about 13Â° C

Crowds - This is a very popular event

Lunch - Fish & Chips, with malt vinegar and lashings of mayo for the fries (nic) or ketchup (X).

Race 1 - I sit it out, X picks winner, pays 5 to 2.

Race 2 - I wager a toteswinger [aptly named- X] and my picks place 1st and 2nd. I walk away with 7 quid [the number 7 grey horse (see photo) must have used his fifth leg to come in second...name: Lenny Bee - X]

Race 3 - Bollocks!

Race 4 - X is big winner, picks 25 to 1 long shot! [when in doubt, go Irish. - X] She's buying dinner tonight! [well, if a stop at the Sainsbury alcohol aisle and doing the dishes counts, yep. - X]Â Though we did place a Â£5 bet which could have won us Â£1,505, had only we won!

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Race 5 - We was whupped in the 5th. No joy in Kempton today.

Race 6 - Unbelievably incapable bet taker manages to completely bollocks up my bets. I want no bets for the 6th, but a swing for the 8th and an eachway for the 7th. He places a swing for the 6th, and it takes him three tries to get the bet for the 7th sorted. I fail to catch the 6th vs. 8th mix-up, and waste Â£4 in the process. Bollocks for the 6th

Race 7 – I picked the big winner, Eforetta, and collect Â£53.90 for a Â£8 bet! Yay!!

Race 8 – I have picked Pretty Bonnie and Hurricane Harriet in a swing (both horses either win, place or show) and am supremely confident. Oops! All day long the field crew have demonstrated that they are incapable of getting the horses into the gate. This race is no different, and for the third time today, a horse is scratched because of this. In this case, however, it is my horse, Hurricane Harriet, and that busts my swing bet. Bollocks, Bollocks, Bollocks! Pretty Bonnie goes on to win in a walk, and I collect nothing because of this incompetent crew! Argh!!! Well, at least I get a refund on the Â£4 bet. End of day? I am up about Â£30. X has not counted out yet. [firmly believing that a bad day at the track beats a good day at work – X]

Back home again, and to a dinner of cold roast beef from last night, along with green beans, poached and then thrown into a hot skillet with a couple of slices of streaky bacon, chopped and crisped, with a pinch of sea salt and pepper and some butter and oil (yum). Added a salad of the rest of the gem from yesterday, this time the cocktail-shaker dressing is augmented with a dollop of raspberry jam in place of the mustard of last night. [and a viewing of TV film Compulsion on the telly with Ray Winstone as family chauffeur and Parminder Nagra. Not a thought of ER entered my mind – X]

This is the life of the well heeled gentry in London today. You may hear of the era of decadent excess in the city being over. Nope, not here, not in Fitzrovia, not on our watch. We are living high on the hog [in all its glorious manifestations] for about Â£10 a day, and loving it!