

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

A Gut Return

by Jamie Moore

Instinct is a marvellous thing. It can neither be explained nor ignored. Four days had elapsed since his return and Charlie could sense his imminent slippage into the security of well-worn bitterness sweetened with apathy and duty. Over that time, he'd been trying to separate sun-kissed, after-glow, holiday euphoria from the fog of jet-lag and a reality that sat under a different cloud. In so doing, something in his internal dynamic, those changes of fluidity and synaptic response that cause fools to rush in or angels to blush, was signalling him to greater positivity.

He'd slept like a laptop computer, lids closed but the lights on. Lingering malware wormed its way into theta dreams, perpetual awareness of his morning return to a daily commute and the theatre of work denuding him of refreshing sleep. And yet he'd woken this morning with a purpose that drove him beyond his prescribed limits. The counter-intuitive zeal propelled him out of the house before any human was awake, brushing his teeth only once, and he set forth onto a train full of cosseted commuters, smiling wantonly at any vague eye contact that came his way.

Intuitively, Charlie Mazdani was aware of a point of inflection with this congregation with whom he shared no sense of community; indeed, that change was afoot. Absorbed by mood over deed, and too fearful to confront what this instinctive marvel could mean lest he abandon ship on another false horizon, he instead tripped the light fantastic across the station concourse, waltzing into the office for his earliest start since time immemorial.

The working day began in frequency with the buzz between his ears. Smiles were released and returned like emissaries, and the lack of an apparent case load enabled Charlie to wander the office as Pompey himself in receipt of a triumph.

By mid-afternoon and his only meeting of the day, Charlie was trying to push through the effects of his carb-rich lunch, and found himself reducing the earnest discussion around the table to a faint drone that was equally irritating and sobering.

As he wandered to the station at the end of the day, Charlie realised he should feel defeated, but he couldn't ignore an involuntary sense of impermanence to his day, that everything could flip as well as a pancake. Outside the side entrance to Fenchurch Street station, the same man sat forlornly on the cold pavement on a withered, rust sleeping bag, a cardboard sign declaring his birthday with a cartoon face devoid of hope. It took Charlie an instant to recognise himself in this man, to recognise the possibilities in us all.

How simple choices can lead us down any number of alternate paths, how trails can link and lead us to the end of the line. Why not his own? He crouched to meet the man's gaze. There was little difference in their ages, but the eyes betrayed a different tale, they were the pupils to an incarcerated soul, a blistering lifetime lived in the betrayal of love, a punch to the face and the smash of a bottle, with no more cards to play. Melancholy melded terror in the pit of his gut and Charlie's instincts declared themselves. Abruptly he stood, dazed as blood rushed to his head. "To hell with this," he said, to nobody. "I'm getting out of here."

Timed exercise: <200 words

There's something happening here, I know it. There's a homeless girl sat on a bedraggled jacket in the corner of the exit. Her face appears as a grazed knee. Above her a 12-sheet poster and a pretty girl of similar age urges her to 'GET THE GLOW'. An old man stands in the middle like a slot machine shaking a yellow bucket, wearing a sign that begins with the word 'HELP...' while being furiously ignored by thousands passing him at warp speed, scientists having proven that reducing their peripheral vision by 87% enables them to beat the same path unhindered. Policemen stand by in adapted high-vis jackets, bearing ornamental semi-automatic weaponry and tactical toys to titillate fan-boy fantasies. There's something happening up there, high in the heavily beamed alcove above. Pigeons flap, and coo and crap, freedom illusory, bound to the circular flow of detritus below. When the explosion went off...