

New Horizon

Rotherham, the hot summer of 1976. The sun blasts from the white furnace of the sky. The leaves on the musty privet hedges curl brown. Two girls sit bare legged on the kerbside chatting idly and dipping sticks into the melting tarmac like pen and ink, writing their names and making mystical runes on the pavement, as if trying to divine their future.

"What subjects are you going to choose for 'O' level, Trace?"

"Dunno really, my mum says why bother at all. Aunty Peg'll give me a job in her sweet shop when I'm sixteen, You don't need exams for that."

"Yeah, but don't you want to go to college or university? I do. I want to be a nurse."

Tracy shrugs her shoulders. "It's alright for you, your dad's a teacher. He knows all about that stuff. No one in our family has ever gone to college. Couldn't afford it even if I could get in."

"Dad says you're clever enough Trace, and you can get grants these days. He'd help you."

"I'm not sure, Cath, and anyway how would mum cope without me? You know how she is."

"Still coming to Bridlington with us tomorrow?"

Tracy nods, not liking to admit that she had never been to the seaside. "See you tomorrow, Cath. Better get home for tea."

She plods home in the heat and lets herself in to the mean little house. No carpets, no pictures on the walls, no ornaments. Money was always tight. Her dad left when she was a baby. Gran says he was a waste of space anyway. She spreads marmite on a slice of white bread and heats a tin of soup. Mum will be back later after her shift in the pub. Hopefully alone, hopefully sober.

The next day they set off early to avoid the traffic. Cath's mum puts the radio on and they all sing along, even Cath's dad. The fields are scorched and dry, but still beautiful to Tracy who is more used to the hemmed in narrow streets of the council estate and the broken-bottle-strewn recreation ground.

They sit on the beach, Cath's mum with her nose in a book. Cath and her dad go in search of ice-cream. Tracy spreads her toes and feels the soft sand between them. Behind her families stroll along the seafront. She hears their distant happy chatter and smells the sweet burning hot candy floss as it gathers on the stick inside the whirling drum. Too early for dinner yet, but her mouth waters at the thought of tangy vinegar on batter covered cod and the crunch of salty chips. Maybe even some mushy peas.

The seagulls swoop and squall overhead, caught on the breeze letting it take them where it will. The calm sea glitters and sparkles. Further out white horses fleck the horizon. A ship in the distance slowly disappears to another land, another world. "And why shouldn't I, why not me?" thinks Tracy with a smile.

503 words