

## The Year without a Summer

by Susan Tracy

The Year without a Summer came and went without Gerard and his young son noticing. The endless days and nights of uncertainty and concern had taken them over. After his mother had passed away Gerard took care to meet his young son every day from school. He was trying to keep some sense of routine and normality, although of course things could never be the same again. Gerard stretched out his arm to open the car door.

“What’s that, Dad?”

Gerard looked down at his arm. A red speckled rash was creeping up past the elbow to his shoulder.

There was a silence, broken by Mrs Broyle pulling up alongside in her racy green Range Rover. Gerard pulled down the sleeve of his jumper.

“Gerard, Tom! So good to see you. When can you come over ?”

Tom had already jumped in his father's car, he didn't want to talk to Mrs Broyle. She always asked if he was alright, and Tom wasn't.

“Thanks , yes, we're coping!” Gerard lied, then followed Tom into the car and shut the door. They sat and waited until Mrs Broyle had collected young Charlie and pulled away.

“Dad, what's wrong with your arm?”

“I don’t know son. Think I must have got some kind of allergy. Yes, that’s it. I tried a new em...shower gel. Yes, that’s it, the new shower gel.”

He started the engine and put the car into first gear. With his hands on the steering wheel he pushed back his sleeve and took a quick look at his arm.

That night after Gerard had cleared away the supper things they both sat down in front of the telly, and had a cup of tea. Tom went upstairs before the nine o’clock news. Be up in ten, son. We’ll finish that story we began last night.

But they didn’t finish the story. Gerard went up to his son with a sense of foreboding. What he heard on the news confirmed his suspicions. He had contracted the virus. He scooped Tom up in his arms in a bear hug.

“We’re going to go away, you and I.”

“Are we Dad? Why? What about school?”

“Well, you know what? I think that after all we’ve been through they’ll have a little bit of pity and be understanding. Now you go to sleep. We’ll be off in the morning.”

As he drew up the covers Gerard noticed a small patch of red on the back of Tom’s neck.

“Goodnight son.”

The following day they were up early and sped off in the car, warmly wrapped. They were going to find their own isolation, quarantine. They were off to the seaside, to find a little bit of sun.