

Looking Back Out to Sea

by Victoria Cooper

Emily watched her sister struggling to shut the car door while wind whipped her blonde hair into ghoulish shapes above her head. She was a drowning woman in air. Further along the street a mother tugged two children along the pavement, pushing through the squall and pulling against childish whim.

Like the gale outside, Lily blew in with drooping tulips, a perpetual smile and wearing a tie-dye dress. She looked ridiculous, Emily thought. With her mind already set on her mood for the day; she turned her head away, disgusted.

“Morning, how are we? Gorgeous day out there it’s blowing a storm. Serious rollers too. You’ve got a first-class seat in here, you’re so lucky.”

The endless chatter. When would she stop referring to her as a collective? They shared nothing but cobalt eyes and migraines now.

“I’m definitely swimming. Look at those powerful waves. They are so life affirming, aren’t they?”

Emily seethed from her armchair facing away from her sister.

“Do you remember that camping holiday to Newport, when you got stung by a wasp and shouted bugger at Dad?”

She laughed and Emily flinched. Shut her eyes and saw her father’s kind ones looking back shocked, then felt his slap on the back of her sunburnt legs. She stared blankly back at the sea. When would Lily take her chirpiness away?

That dress, the too loud laugh, it disrupted the quiet, it unsettled everything. When would she just leave her alone to be lonely?

Emily saw the mother outside again; the little girl skipping in front now, her pink cotton dress billowing out like a sailing boat, the boy dragging driftwood. His mother kept turning round, checking he was still with them.

“I can’t remember if we went in the Humber or the Countryman, can you? Lovely white sand though. Mum and Dad even let us stay up late and watch the stars from the beach. We tried counting all eighty-five of Gemini, do you remember? I do. You said, “I have everything in life I have ever wanted.” What a funny thing to say for a little girl, but you were right, you know; we did.”

“Shut up,” Emily shouted inside her head.

Shut up, shut up, shut up, you stupid old woman. The noise of each syllable ricocheted inside and filled her up with rage. She had no room for stars or waves. She no longer wanted anything anymore.