

### A day at the Seaside 1960.

Bobby and Alex had been friends almost from the day that they both started attending secondary school two years ago. Alex had joined the new school along with a few of his old friends from junior school but Bobby's family had only just moved into the area and so had no friends at the new school.

Gradually Bobby gravitated towards Alex's group of friends and by the end of the first term Alex and Bobby were almost inseparable.

At the end of each year the school would choose 30 children and offer them the chance to spend a weeks' holiday at a summer camp in the country. The actual camp was open to all schools and could accommodate up to 12 groups, each in separate dormitories. Various inter-school activities would be arranged and there was also a lot of spare time when the schools could decide for themselves what to do or could give the kids free time to amuse themselves.

Alex and Bobby had put their names down the previous year for the trip but were not chosen, but this year they were lucky and both boys had made the final selection.

On this particular day at the camp their school had decided to organise a trip to the seaside at Brighton and all the boys were really excited about it, especially Bobby who had never been to the seaside and had only ever seen it on postcards and at the cinema.

As the coach taking the boys pulled into the car park at Brighton and the driver was parking in the area prescribed for coaches, one of the teachers stood up at the front to address the boys and give them their rules and general instruction. Each boy was handed a packed lunch prepared for them at the camp and the only actual rule was – Don't get into trouble and be back here by 4 o'clock this afternoon. The door to the coach was opened and like a floodgate being opened, the boys poured out onto the tarmac.

They soon formed themselves into their friendship groups and went their various ways, mostly in the direction of the beach. Bobby and Alex weren't particularly friendly with any of the other boys so the two of them ran off in the direction of the beach as if their pants were on fire.

Once there they paused on the promenade just long enough to take in the view, the rich blue sea full of people paddling and swimming, the shiny silver grey beach but most of all the mass of people crammed together in such a small place, some sitting on deck chairs but most of them just lying or sitting on their towels on the sand.

Both were silent until Bobby, as if giving an instruction said "right then" and, on cue, off came their shoes and socks and shirts and they raced down the beach to see who could get to the sea first. Bobby was the slowest and took his time walking across the pebbles "What's all this" he shouted to Alex. "Where's the sand, these bloody stones hurt my feet. You said there'd be sand on the beach".

"Yer, there is usually" answered Alex. "I've never bin 'ere before, so I didn't know what you get down here. In the sea it's better, there's sand down 'ere".

Satisfied with the answer he made his way gingerly towards the water, and then in he walked.

"What the hec, it's bloody freezing. You said the sea would be warm, what's up with you".

"It is warm" said Alex. "It only feels cold when you first get in. I wish I had me trunks".

"Why, can you swim?"

“No, can you? but we could ‘ave a splash around couldn’t we” said Alex “We can’t get our trousers wet can we?”

“No we can’t can we” said Bobby. “Anyway I’m ‘ungry, let’s ‘ave our lunch then we can go for a walk around. We can sit on the wall up there and then we’re still on the beach”.

After eating their lunch they put their socks and shoes on and strolled along the promenade looking at the shops and ice cream sellers and generally taking it all in and enjoying just being somewhere new and being able to do just what they want to.

On the opposite side of the road that ran along beside the promenade there were even more shops and they all had stalls and counters outside on the pavement for you look the gifts and souvenirs for sale.

“Got any money on yer?” asked Bobby, “I’ve got a couple of bob, ‘ow about you”.

“Yer me too, let’s go over there and see if we can get anything for our Mums”, and with that Bobby made his way across the road to the shops with Alex in close pursuit but taking a little more time to check the traffic.

“Blimey ‘ave you seen the price of these, I wanted to get me Mum something with ‘Brighton’ on it” said Bobby “even the blooming key rings. I’m gonna go inside and see if I can get something. You wait ‘ere”.

Uncertain why he had to wait outside Alex did as he was told and carried on looking at the little trinkets, bookmarks and other things available. Anything with ‘Brighton’ on it, it didn’t matter what, but he had to get something. After all his Mum had paid for this holiday even though she couldn’t afford a holiday for herself.

As Alex walked along the rows of souvenirs and things, picking up the trinkets he liked the look of so he could check the prices he wondered why Bobby was still inside the shop when he became aware of a woman from the shop rushing in his direction.

Suddenly she grabbed him by the arm and shouted “Got you, you’re with him inside. You’re coming with me!”

Alex looked at her with surprise but the anger in her face frightened him and in one movement he tore his arm away from her and ran for his life away from the shop. He could feel his heart pumping harder than he had ever felt it before but the adrenalin somehow kept him going.

Eventually, he couldn’t run any further and had to stop even if it meant he would be caught, but to his surprise there was nobody behind him. He had made it to safety.

As he leaned against a wall trying to get his breath back he suddenly remembered Bobby, he was still in the shop where they had caught him so he had to go back and somehow find out what had happened to his friend.

He very carefully and very slowly made his way back to the shop keeping to the promenade side of the road with both eyes peeled for police and shop people but hoping only to see Bobby.

Soon he was opposite the shop but everything seemed ok, people were looking at the stalls, shoppers were going in and out of the shop and there were no police, but also there was no Bobby.

Alex sat down on a long bench directly opposite the shop so that he had a good view. Fear had welled up again within him as he wondered how to explain what had happened to Bobby. His

teacher made it clear, “Don’t get into any trouble”, but now Bobby had been arrested and he doesn’t know where he is and then when he gets home he’ll have to explain it all again to his Mother and probably Bobby’s Mother as well. Fear quickly became despair.

He then thought about the time. He checked his watch and the time was a quarter to four, he could wait no longer. If he was late back things would be even worse. He had one last look at the shop and then ran to the car park.

He got there pretty quickly as they luckily hadn’t wandered too far, but as he walked towards the coach he saw his teacher standing by the door pacing up and down.

“Alex” he shouted “where have you been. You’re the last one back. Get on the coach quickly, we have to get back to camp for tea. I’m hungry, I don’t know about you”.

Alex was lost for words, how could he be last. What about Bobby, he’s still in the shop! But he said nothing and got on the coach.

Then he heard another voice. “Where you bin?” It was Bobby, “I’ve bin ‘ere ages. We’ve all bin waiting for yer”.

“I’ve been bloody looking for you” Alex said. “When that woman grabbed me I knew they ‘ad you inside but I legged it and then came back to look for you. That’s why I’m late!”

“Well when you ran off that woman and the woman ‘olding me started chasing you, so I shot off in the opposite way. I came back ‘ere finking you’d come back ‘ere as well”.

“Well I didn’t” said Alex. “I was worried about you and didn’t want to leave you behind, but at least we’re both ‘ere now, but if you ever try anything like that again I’ll bloody kill you myself. D’you understand?”

“Yer ok” said Bobby. “I’m sorry but I knew we didn’t ‘ave much money and you wanted something for your Mum”.

“Yes, I did” Alex replied “but I didn’t want to steal it. How can I give me Mum something I’ve stolen”,

“yer ’spose so, ok, I said I’m sorry, and I am, won’t do it again”.