

# SALLY GILL

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BA Creative Writing

## The Billy Morrrows of Blakeney – Three Generations

READERS NOTE: This story was written before the 2016 United Kingdom European Union Membership Referendum.

Year: 2086

Billy Morrow the Third - Blakeney

Here I am sitting in my little boat waiting to go out to sea. As per any other Norfolk March, the sky is grey, the sea is grey, every single sodding thing is grey. I look at the obstacles ahead of me. It's not the tides or the wind that I'm worried about. It's not even getting caught in one of those hacking storms, the sort that soaks you through to your boxers. It's the windmills. Like Don Quixote stepped into an Escher painting, they are spread as far as the eye can see, my nautical maze. All that stands between myself and some semblance of freedom.

Eighty years ago, people used to be able to protest about the wind farms. They would write to local papers, march up and down the beaches with placards, take lengthy petitions to the government. Down with wind farms! Don't obstruct our view with wind farms! That was until there wasn't enough power to watch their televisions. Then they were begging for those robotic windmills to be put round the entire coast. Not only would they power the country, but they would keep the Europeans out. And if the windmills could be equipped with bombs and slashing arms then all the better.

In the back of my mind, I recite "I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and sky." Well it would be lonely if it wasn't for all those fucking windmills. Anyway speaking of windmills, I hear that Holland is quite nice this time of year. There are rumours that Holland is still governed by the central bank of Europe. They have pensions and savings and some kind of credible income tax system. They don't live in communist townships, where everyone is equal, but no one really is. They can have children whenever they want to, with whomever they want, not like over here. I wish I could take Gemma there. I miss her every single day.

All I have to hope is that my little boat makes the journey. And what happens when I get there? Who knows. Will I be treated like one of those Syrian refugees we were taught about at school? Will there be fresh food, something tasty that doesn't come out of a tin? I just need to make it across the ocean.

Year: 2076

Billy Morrow the Third

After they took our beloved Eve away, Gemma just withered. Eve was just 10 years old. A little poppet with a love of the sky and the sea. We knew it was coming, but the reality was simply monstrous. The television always said it was "for the good of our country," and "what makes Great Britain great." But she was just a little girl. Centralised Workforce Education was meant to be a temporary initiative. Just a short-term measure, to help with food manufacture. There was no reason why the children couldn't be taught to operate the machinery to help keep this great

country going. They would become adept and earn sufficient credits to go into government housing by the age of 16. It was the only way of ensuring that everyone made equal commitment to the country. Blah de blah de blah.

But I knew that it was devastatingly wrong, and as for my wife, it was like her heart had gone to Norwich along with Eve and her solitary suitcase of clothes. We had the address of the canning factory, but with fossil fuels long gone, a journey to the main city would take days by foot. Gemma begged on her knees that the enforcers take her instead of Eve. But god knows it was fruitless even trying to show them the smallest fraction of humanity. Anyone could see by the colour of Gemma's skin that she had serious vitamin deficiencies. The whites of her eyes had become grey a couple of years ago and her hair looked like sea grass. I tried over the years to stop her from giving her own food rations over to Eve, but it was impossible. It was like trying to tell a mother hen not to sit on her eggs. Gemma would give her body and soul to our daughter.

Year: 2066

Billy Morrow the Third

Here I am sitting in the waiting room. The doctors said that the genetic tests would be done by the end of the day. The back of my hand has white indentations in it from where Gemma has been gripping. I don't say anything to her about it. If there are any anomalies, the baby will be taken from us. The government needs to make sure that the Great British gene pool is pure, that there are no signs of inbreeding. I know this means no extra thumbs, toes or fingers. But then there's something to do with the chromosomes. If this baby is taken from us, it will break Gemma's heart. I remember seeing her down by the harbour when we were only little. She was tottering around in plastic high heels, pushing an equally plastic baby in a pram. Whenever she got to the road edge, she would take the baby out of it's pram, show it the road, move it's head left and right, and then cross over. It was like she was made for this.

It took us almost a year to get a licence to conceive and cost us a whole lifetime's saving credits. Ten years of shelling prawns at Cley Smokehouse. It's a wonder by that time that Gemma would even go near me. You attach a little machine to the arse of the tiny prawn, press the pedal for a thin blast of air, and then the shell of the prawn would be blown off – preferably into the bucket. Invariably however the tiny fragments of shell would be blown over me. Even with the hairnets, I'd always leave work with a head full of stinking shrimp. Then once a month I would come home with a pay packet made up of grocery credits and two solitary leisure vouchers. I only ever got saving credits if I had excelled the shelling quota. That's a shit load of prawns to pay for one tiny baby.

Then the nurse warden brings her out. This tiny little child, a girl. The daughter we have already named Eve. In the back of my mind I think she looks a little bit like a prawn, but I don't mention this to Gemma. She looks like she's seen The Mother Theresa. And for that, I'd shell a million more shrimp and not complain once.

Year: 2056

Billy Morrow the Third

I've read in books about that lightening moment when love hits you. Well it was just like that when I saw Gemma. I think that I'm one of the lucky ones. Most of my mates have had partnerships arranged by the council. Allocations are made depending on blood type, chromosomal arrangements and DNA type. They want to make sure that cousins don't marry cousins and then pollute the Great British gene pool. My mate Abdul said his grandfather married his first cousin, which was apparently fine in his temple 50 years ago. Anyway when their first baby came out, it had an extra thumb. It looked like it had been grafted on the kid's hand, like when they used to grow ears on the backs of mice.

My marriage application to Gemma was granted within months and as soon as the wedding ceremony was over she moved into the little fisherman's cottage on the harbour. Every morning I would go to work at the smokehouse, and she would head down to the estuary to gather samphire, sea beet, winkles, bladderwrack and sweet oar reed. She'd even prise limpets off the side of the abandoned dinghies. Do you know what a limpet tastes like? A giant bogey. I swear there is nothing you can add to a limpet to improve it's flavour or texture. You just have to chew those things down.

One day we're going to have a child. We just have to save up the credits for the government licence. I've heard what they do to children that are born without a licence and it's not worth the risk. We're going to have a bone-fide beautiful British baby.

Year: 2046

Billy Morrow the Second

Life seems to be coming to an end for us. Margaret and I have been given orders to move to Community 253 at Cley-next-the-Sea. We're protesting, but I'm not sure what good it will do. The online brochures make it sound like one of those hippy communes you read about in the Encyclopedia Britannica, but I don't really believe it. Little Billy is working at the smokehouse now, but I just don't have the dexterity anymore. They've said that he can stay in the fisherman's cottage providing that he is still working in the area. Fish seems to be the only food source that comes in all year round. Probably the only wild animal that we have left in Great Britain. Apart that is, from the cats that no one can afford to keep any more. Some of them have started swimming in the harbour now, diving for crabs. That's evolution for you. I'm surprised that the government hasn't suggested that we start eating the cats too. Although I can't imagine that there's a lot of nutrition in a cat that lives off baby mud crabs.

The power is only on for a couple of hours a day too. We were told that all electricity has been diverted to the main production cities. This is all very well, but it's bloody nippy at night.

Year: 2036

Billy Morrow the Second

Little Billy is constantly hungry. Every night now I go out to the harbour with a bucket, string and a little bit of bacon. I'm surprised that there are any crabs left in the water now and some of them are so tiny, it's hardly worth boiling them up. Little Billy has got surprisingly adept though, at sucking out the muddy-flavoured meat. I feel lucky that we've got to stay in our little house. It doesn't matter if your names are on the deeds, all properties are now part of the government pool. They've been reallocating housing, depending on your family size. The one-child policy is still in force, but so many people are looking after their parents, and their parent's parents.

Margaret came to work with me down at the smokehouse. It's one of the few businesses that are still thriving. I guess it's true what they say, there's plenty more fish in the sea. However I doubt there are many seals, now we've started eating those too. The boats come in and we smoke whatever they bring, ready to go to the cannery. There once was a time when everyone was picky about the type of fish they were eating. There was a market for dab, flounder, plaice, crevettes, mackerel. Each had a different value. Every now and again we'd get a turbot in. The MP for Norwich would pay 200 credits for a turbot.

These days, pretty much everything is just shoved in the barrels, ready for preserving. There are fish that I don't even know the name of. Ones that would have been chucked back in the sea. We've even started smoking the worms that are dug up from the beach at Wells. Their texture is bloody disgusting. Like eating cat food that has been put through a potato ricer.

Year: 2026

Billy Morrow the Second

The six months since Dad died have been awful. In an attempt to become a self-sufficient country, the government has stopped importing anything from anywhere. Remember that big Hovis campaign that said that all wheat was sourced from Britain? Well it turns out it was all nonsense. There were never enough crops to provide each family with a loaf of bread. Give us this day our daily bread? Only if it came from Spain, or Hungary, or anywhere where the rain isn't constantly pissing down. So rationing started in January, back like it did in the Second World War, almost a century ago. Once a week we would get emailed the codes we needed for the supermarket shop. One loaf of bread, half a kilo of potatoes, three types of fruit, three types of root vegetables, 100g sugar cane. The whole business is thoroughly depressing.

Margaret and I moved into Dad's old house. It's cosy, but it's fine. She's running the tours out to see the seals, but it's dwindling. There isn't a lot of money around these days for getting out and about, but she still manages to make a little commission. There's talk of getting rid of currency though. Ridiculous. All those years when we stalwartly decided not to use The Euro. And The Chancellor is making plans for a national electronic credit system. No money will change hands ever again. Everything will be taxed before the credits reach your account. Sure it's simple, but it reminds me

of when I was a kid. We always listened to music on CD. And then no one had CDs anymore. The music was just floating around in the ether. In the cloud. Like it wasn't really music.

It all just seems to be another way that we're isolating ourselves from the rest of the world. On the television they talk about this great day when the whole country marched down to the village halls with our mighty pens to liberate Great Britain. I guess liberation is the eye of the beholder.

Year: 2016

Billy Morrow the First – Blakeney Harbour

At half ten in the morning Billy Morrow leaves his cobbled fisherman's cottage, with Jasper, a dishevelled looking Yorkshire terrier, trotting along beside him. He never worried about putting Jasper on the lead these days, despite his cataracts, Jasper wasn't going very far. Billy stopped first at the newsagents to pick up the copy of The Daily Mail he had reserved for him every day. He then walked down to the harbour. Already there were families sitting down on the quay with their buckets, crab lines and bags of cheap bacon. They sat with their legs dangling over the edge of the pavement, catching tiny mud-feeding harbour crabs, ones that had been caught a thousand times before, to then be tossed back into the shallow, oily water.

Billy stopped and had a chat with Mike from the deli. The weather had been unseasonably warm, and already enormous palettes of deep red strawberries had been delivered from Wiveton Farm. Billy bought a punnet to eat after his supper, even though he far preferred the sour punch of gooseberries. He then moved on to the fishmongers, Billy's favourite stop of the morning. The smell of bloaters, dab and cods roe could make his mouth water, even early in the day. The smoked prawns from Cley Smokehouse were tangy and sweet, almost as though they had been given a good squeeze of lemon before they had been smoked. There must have been something in the wood chips.

Finally Billy made an unusual stop, to the village hall, right at the end of the harbour street. Today, instead of being full of insipid watercolours of the harbour being sold especially for the tourist market, the hall was a temporary home for the voting booths. It was the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June. A special voting day and Billy knew exactly where to put the cross on his voting form. The newspaper had told him all about Brexit. It seemed clear cut. Great Britain would be better off leaving the European Union. We are a strong, proud country and will be much better on our own. Billy Morrow would be part of giving Britain a new future.