

BEARMOUTH

LIZ HYDER

I am lernin my lettuz
I am lernin mi letterz
I am lerrnin my lettiss

I am lernin my letterz.

I am learnin my letters.

Better, says Thomas as he blows out the lyte.

Tis hard work usin my brayne.

Thomas teeches me at lunch when the uvvers are at caban an sometimes on Maykers Day I have lessuns arfter prayers.

In the week, the men sit an diskuss things for grown ups at caban an us youngs arnt alloud in. Menstalk they say. Not for youngs.

So I sits out here wi Thomas an he teeches me my letters. They are hard. Only me an Tobe are learnin letters. The rest are too old. Tobe is more young than me but he learns fast an all.

Thomas is my best frend tho hes twyce my ayge an more. He looks arfter me, keeps an eye out. I am diffrent see. I am not one thing or the uvver. They call me YouNuck for I am not a boy nor yet a wimmin an they hold no truck for gels down here so I must by all akkounts be a YouNuck. Not one thing or the uvver. Thomas dunt lyke them calling me that tho so he calls me Newt.

En ee double yoo tee. Newt.

I lyke that.

Thomas says its an undergrawnd creeture, small
an nimball. Lyke me.

Learnin letters is hard. My eyes strayne at the end
o lessun wi the bryteness o the candul lyte. Then tis
back to work for all three o us.

Bearmouth is my home see. Tis calld Bearmouth cos it was near the surfiss wi its wyde open maw so us could walk strayte into the mine but then they dug down, deeper an deeper, myles an myles down, so we are toastee warm at work. So tis the wrong nayme now. Bearmouths are for shallow mines an we ent that. It should be calld Black Pit. Or center o the earf.

When I first cayme, I was a trapper see. Baysic rayte o not very much coinage but an important job shore. Lettin the air in an out, openin doors for ponys an the rest.

Now I am a trayler workin to my hagger. We are a team me an Jack. He shouts at me when I am not fast enuff. He cuts wi his mandril an I packs an moves it.

A trayler has a hole nuvver langwidge you must learn fast. When I startd, I knew nun o it but Jack teeched me. He says Im smart. He dunt kno his letters at all. But he can count. An he works fast. Very fast. Sometimes tis hard to keep up wi him. But the more we cuts, the more we earns.

I earn more being a trayler. One day Ill be a hagger too, lyke Jack.

I gets fiftean at the moment. Hagers gets more lyke sixtee wuld you believe.

I can do my job blindfold pretty much.

Which is a good thin cos it sayves on canduls.

Canduls are spensive.

I spends fyve on canduls evry week. Fyve on food an matchiss, two on hot water an the rest. Which leeves three wot I sends to Ma.

I ent seen Ma an the rest since I cayme here. Maykers Day ent long enuff to get there an back arfter prayers an the lyke. An I only has that one day a week.

It taykes most harf a day to get back up there, to the surfiss. An it costs. Thirtee each way cos o the lift sharft. So I stays here. Tis cheeper in the dark. I ent seen daylyte since I was fore. Not shore how long ago that were in all trooth but it feels a long time since.

Bein a trayler is tuff but it helps me learn my letters. See, when I pushs the basket to an fro from tram to main road, up the inklyne, in the heat an the dust an dark, I goes over the letters in my head.

When we finishes today, there is a new boy in
Gambles bunk. He lays there all day an cry cryes in
the corner til Jack slaps him an tells him to shuddup
an keep choired so we could get some sleep.

Gamble died last week. Blown up silly bugger an
then Harrison got it an all from the vapours tryin to
rescue him. Arfterdamp can kill they say. An it did
for Harrison.

Two emptee beds.

Now just one.

The new boy looks so spinky clene see. Lyke a
newborn foal.

His eyes are massiv. He looks frytend too.
Petryfyed.

He ent sed a word.