Wells-next-the-Sea

I am anxious driving through green England always moving on, never stopping long. In Norfolk, an argument east of The Wash an old man wearing a cloth cap strokes a horse’s whiskery nose in grey light.

A man, a horse, a cart, a sign. Yes, she wants to take the ride but with the reins in her experienced hands. The old man hears us out, considers us, before agreeing to a test drive.

He watches. Scavenging gulls hover. A merry-go round and round the empty carpark. I talk her up, a city boy standing close, *clap, clap* my praise overflowing. You’d think she was Clancy’s daughter.

Our high seat might be a magic carpet, morning air still, few cars, glimpse of sea. Horse skiving, I ask how she knows the way. The horse does. I’m just along for the ride. Some early shoppers stop, turn to stare.

The old nag’s pace increases. We must be heading back, she says. Aren’t you steering? In control? Hardly. Stop waving, you show-off. She seems happier now, in her element.

The horizon behind, I picture Europe beyond, my mind fizzing with travel’s romance. Then the old man, looking lonely, relieved. He says, I knew you’d be all right, his words a lighthouse beam of hope.

*Ian C Smith*