



Walking Through Seaweed, by Ian Hamilton Finlay

This is a shortened version of a one-act two-hander. In the 1960s, two teenage girls are in a city street at dusk. They have sauntered up to look in a shop window. Three doors away is a café with a juke-box, with raucous or wistful pop songs carrying faintly into the street. The setting could be anywhere in England.

First girl: See them toffee apples in the window?

Second girl: Yep.

First girl: Real old-fashioned they look... Fancy toffee apples...

Second girl: You ever ate toffee apples?

First girl: Yeah. Sure we ate them. Lots of times. When I was wee we was great on toffee apples. But I wouldn't eat one now. It'd be undignified.

Second girl: Maybe I can go to the shop and get one of them toffee apples...

First girl: And eat it now... Out here in the street? Not when you're out with me you don't eat a toffee apple...

Second girl: Oh well, all right... But I think it would be nice to have eaten one of them toffee apples.

First girl: It's all right for kids to eat toffee apples. But we're not kids now. We're sixteen.

Second girl: Yep. Grown-up women. *(Pause. The pop music grows momentarily louder.)* How do you like that one that's on the jukebox in the café now?

First girl: I never heard that one before.

Second girl: It was on the telly.

First girl: We ain't got a telly yet.

Second girl: No.

First girl: Everyone around us... They've all got tellies...

Second girl: Yep... Them toffee apples look real good... And do you see them licorice straps?

First girl: No.

Second girl: Seaweed.

First girl: What?

Second girl: Seaweed. *(Pause.)* You ever walked through seaweed? – that seaweed that grows by the sea...you know? That seaweed that's all slippery... Mostly brown like them strips of licorice?...

First girl: No.

Second girl: You ever took your shoes and stockings off and sort of – paddled through it?

First girl: No. I'd be scared to.

Second girl: Why'd you be scared to?

First girl: Maybe there'd be crabs in it would come and bite you – and – and I be scared to walk through seaweed.

Second girl: Oh, but it's lovely to walk in seaweed... You take off your shoes and your socks – and you carry them... And you go walking through... right up to your ankles in it – like a dancer... It makes you feel like a dancer...

First girl: I like dancing...

Second girl: So do I.

First girl: I like rock 'n' roll... and jiving...

Second girl: I like that too... It's lovely.

First girl: Everyone goes jiving.

Second girl: Yep... *(Pause.)* You got a boyfriend?

First girl: Yep. I got lots of them.

Second girl: You got lots of boyfriends?

First girl: Yep.

Second girl: What d'you do with them?

First girl: Not much... Go jiving.

Second girl: That all?

First girl: What else? – Go jiving, go to the pictures. Play the jukebox in a café. What else?

Second girl: I got a boyfriend.

First girl: Have you?

Second girl: Yep. I got a boyfriend. And he's sort of special. I mean – I mean I've just the one special boyfriend – and you know what he and I do?

First girl: Go to the pictures?

Second girl: No.

First girl: Go jiving?

Second girl: No.

First girl: Well, what d'you do? You'll have to tell me.

Second girl: Me and my boyfriend – I told you he's special – we go WALKING THROUGH SEAWEED.

First girl: You don't!

Second girl: But we do... we go... in his car... down to where the sea is, and then we take off our shoes... And we walk to the sea... It's so lovely!

First girl: You must be crackers, you and your boyfriend.

Second girl: We are not crackers. He's very nice boy *(Pause.)* And while we're walking through the seaweed... he's ever such a nice boy... he takes hold of my hand...

First girl: What does he do?

Second girl: When we're walking?

First girl: No, what does he DO? What does he work at?

Second girl: He's in advertising.

First girl: What's his name?

Second girl: His first name's Paul.

First girl: You aren't just making all this up are you?

Second girl: How'd I be making it up? I told you his name didn't I? His name's Paul and he's ever so handsome...he has nice dark hair and he's kind of smooth...

First girl: It doesn't sound to me like a nice, smooth, handsome boy that's in advertising – a kind of boy like this Paul – would want to go walking through seaweed.

Second girl: I beg your pardon but he does. Let me tell you he wouldn't *mind* getting bitten by a crab. (*Pause.*) The fact is, he's *fond* of crabs.

First girl: How come you happen to meet this Paul fellow who's so handsome and works in advertising?

Second girl: We met at a dance.

First girl: I never met any handsome smooth fellows – out of advertising – at a dance...

Second girl: Well, maybe you will...

First girl: I *read* of them in magazines... I read of *lots* of them in that magazine my mum gets... Tall, dark and smooth... And come to think of it *their* name was Paul.

Second girl: Paul is a very common name in advertising. What's the name of *your* boyfriend?

First girl: I already told you, I got lots of boyfriends. I can't remember the names offhand. What does Paul do in that advertising place?

Second girl: Well... what he does... is... is go to conferences.

First girl: I read about them conferences in my mum's magazine. There's this boy... the one called Paul, you know... the one who's sort of smooth and dark and handsome – and what he does is... go to conferences.

Second girl: Like Paul. Paul goes conferences.

First girl: What about the other one?

Second girl: I ain't *got* another one.

First girl: Come off it... What about the one with the ginger hair and snub nose. The engineer.

Second girl: I don't know any engineers.

First girl: I bet *he* wouldn't walk through seaweed. I bet the ginger one with the snub nose spends *his* Saturdays at a football match.

Second girl: I don't love *him*. I love Paul.

First group: One of these days – you and Paul – you're going to be sorry for walking through seaweed.

Second girl: Why?

First girl: You're going to get bit... That's why.

Second girl: We *never* get bit... But we just *might* though. That's what's so nice about walking through seaweed... that you might get bit... just a *little*... and when we've walked all through the seaweed...

First girl: Seaweed ain't nice... and the sea ain't nice... and having no telly ain't... Eating toffee apples ain't nice either. I wouldn't put a toe in that seaweed.

Second girl: But it's beautiful the sea... Did you ever dream of it?

First girl: I don't have dreams... Only once I dreamed we had a telly... A great big telly, yards across...

Second girl: I dreamed of the sea once... it was all big and... dark... well... it was – beautiful!

First girl: It was high-fi stereoscopic with five extra speakers...

Second girl: Maybe you could come down with us to the sea... I could hold your hand – like Paul holds my hand...

First girl: You ain't like a magazine fellow that would make me feel all right about that seaweed...

Second girl: I'd hold it tight... ever so tight... we could go walking... like dancers... you and me... we could walk through the seaweed... all the way... right to the sea... And seaweed... it's full of crabs and things... but you got to walk through it... because it's lovely... you got to walk – like a dance... all through the seaweed...right to the sea!

First girl: All my life I kept out of seaweed. I stayed away from seaweed. It ain't... well, nice stuff. You can go and walk in all that seaweed... You can go if you want to – but not with *me*!

Second girl: I like the look of them toffee apples...

First girl: They're just for kids. (*Pause.*) Let's go in the café now... I like that one that's on the jukebox... though it's kind of sad... Come on... let's go.

Second girl: Yep. Let's go in the café and play the jukebox...