

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

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by Sue Hitchcock

Saturday would have been my daughter's fiftieth birthday and I felt more sad than I had in the previous years since she died. I wondered how much her body would have changed in her woodland burial site.

Anna opened her eyes. "I must have been asleep a long time." Then she stretched her arms and legs, enjoying the feeling, no pain, just the joy of an athlete, feeling her strength. The last thing she could remember was lying, paralysed, in bed, but not this bed. "What is this? It is earth." and she struggled free, sat, then stood and shook the dirt from her clothes. There were trees all around and it was completely dark on this moonless night. It was only when she accidentally walked through a tree that she realised she was a ghost. Her phantom heart beat anxiously, as she wondered what this meant. She hadn't believed in an afterlife – not Heaven nor Hell. Would she be judged? How could she find out?

"Is there anybody around?"

She listened and in the distance, up the hill, she could hear voices.

"Here! Come this way!"

The path was difficult to find in the dark, but the voices continued, gradually nearer. Then she saw them. There was a small crowd in an open-sided barn, looking for her and calling.

"Hello, we have been waiting for you."

“Do you know me?”

“We are your ancestors and this is our home ground, where we came from. We only wake when someone new is coming. Tell us your name.”

“I’m Anna, but I don’t know you.”

“You have met one of us, maybe a long time ago. We have another Anna here. We call her “Annie.”

A woman stepped forward from a group who were so alike, they must have been sisters.

“Is your mother still alive? Tell me her name.”

“She was alive, when I was dying. Her name is Susan.”

“Then you are my granddaughter, Lovie, my Susan’s daughter. Tell me about them all!”

Anna held her grandmother’s hand and told her about her aunt, her cousins, her sister and lastly about her own daughter.

“Her Daddy will be taking care of her now, I expect.”

“No he died before me..” and Anna collapsed into her grandmother’s arms. When her sobbing ceased, her grandmother consoled her.

“Do you know where he might be? If he is close, you can call to him and he will come. He will have been waiting for you, like us.”

“His ashes are in Christchurch, over the hills of Hampshire and Dorset. Which way is that?”

“Do you see the sky getting light, over there in the East? Be quick, before it gets light. Turn your back to the light and call his name.”

Anna called, “Gabby, Gabby!” and her voice rang out over the hills like a flute. The wind caught it and carried it to where Gabby’s ghost still cycled endlessly around Hengistbury Head, waiting for her call.

Then a rushing noise came in the wind, the leaves rustled, twigs cracked and there he was, on his bike, still as slim as he was when they first met.

“At last, at last!” he whispered in her ear, holding her tight.

“What woke me now, tonight? Why not before?”

“It must have been Kara. A mother never sleeps, when her child calls. She must have been here.”

“So she is alive and well.”

“There’s no need to worry, let her live! We’ll wait, one lifetime, however long, and we’ll see her again.”