

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

The Turning Tide

by Richard Lewis

Summer's sun had worked its magic, bringing life back to the beach. All chalets were occupied and I was doing my usual, keeping a weather eye out for trouble. The stretch of coastline was treacherous for swimmers, having unusually strong currents and the sea going out for half a mile.

I liked high tide, when water filled the bay, though it never hung around for long, eager to head back into the channel, leaving deep pools where currents had taken bites out of the sandy beach.

A lazy breeze ran its fingers across my weathered boards, doors and windows wide open to the elements. The latest family sat finishing their picnic on my front porch.

It was obvious young Peter couldn't wait to go swimming with his friends Andy, Pat and John, who were older and much better swimmers. Peter had only had a couple of lessons and seemed more confident than he deserved.

"Hey mum, we're going in the water now," he announced.

"You'll have to wait till the tide turns," his mother Laura replied.

This may have been good advice for some beaches but not here, due to the unusual nature of the coastline. I could only watch as events took their course, like a scene from a movie.

The boys waited impatiently as the sea bided its time, preparing to rush back in, covering all in its path. Finally given the green light, the four set off, wading through the warm pools, splashing each other and shrieking with laughter as they ran to meet the incoming tide.

Once in the shallows they'd have to walk a further two hundred yards till the depth was to their liking. With the water now up to their chests, they enjoyed fooling around, diving down for seaweed and decorating themselves in the smelly, slippery stuff.

Laura, was preoccupied clearing away the picnic things, then looking up was shocked to see them in the shrinking distance. 'That's too far out,' she thought, shouting, "come back in," but they weren't looking, nor could they hear.

Peter, being smaller than the others was also looking troubled, as the water crept to his shoulders, but he said nothing being determined to keep up with the older boys.

I was relieved but also apprehensive when Andy, finally spotting the frantic arms waving on the shore and realising just how far out they were, said, "perhaps we'd better head back in."

The four trudged in towards the beach, urging their bodies through the dark waters, but after a short while there was confusion, just as I'd feared, as it suddenly became deeper. The sea playing its tricks. Then it dawned on them, they were entering one of the pools, adding a further two feet, taking them out of their depth.

Jim, the eldest, shouted, "we'll have to swim for it lads."

Pat and Andy followed, leaving Peter rooted to the spot.

Possessing just a handful of strokes, his confidence seemed to have deserted him, doubting he'd make it across the deeper stretch, yet finding his way round the pool with the rising tide probably also seemed impossible.

There was no good option, Peter looked to the sky but it gave no answer; he had to make a choice. Following the others, already yards ahead, he called, "hey! Wait for me."

Taking a deep breath, he set off, arms and legs thrashing ineffectively like a bird with a broken wing. In no time he was out of breath and swallowing water, quickly using up his quota of strokes and starting to go under, his feet trying to find the ground below. Peter looked more alone than ever as the indifferent waters closed in on him. He tried to call for help but no sound came from his lips.

The other boys, finally realising his plight, turned back just as Peter lost consciousness, lying half submerged, face down, as if taking a deep breath looking for something. Between the three of them, they managed to pull him in, gently keeping his head above water.

Laura, now striding in to meet them, took hold of Peter and brought him to the beach, lying him on the sand; then when about to administer mouth to mouth, his whole body convulsed and he started coughing and spluttering, water trickling from his lips.

My fears allayed, I watched as they helped him back to me and wrapped him in a blanket.

Peter was lucky, he may have used up one of his nine lives but I'm sure he'd learnt a valuable lesson, to respect the limits of his abilities.