

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

Four Seasons

by Richard Lewis

Birth

'What is this talked-of mystery of birth but being mounted bareback on the earth?' - Robert Frost

That hot day in June things changed forever when Jess's waters unexpectedly broke. Panic drove us to the hospital, the baby having decided to come six weeks early. Outside it was a surreal scene; due to a freak weather event, red sand blown from the Sahara had descended on cars, streets and pavements, as if everything had turned to rust.

I helped Jess into a small consulting room and we waited for the doctor. Jess seemed to be coping better but it was too much for me and suddenly overcome by the heady mix of anxiety and fierce medicinal smells, I fainted. A nurse caught me as she entered the room. It hadn't helped being told "we must pray for the baby due to it being small and arriving early." When it came to it I somehow missed the action, having been banished from the scene and told to go home as nothing was going to happen until the next day. To my huge relief, mother and baby had managed perfectly well without me.

Having checked on my sleeping wife I headed for the prem ward. When I peered inside the incubator, nothing could have prepared me for the hauntingly beautiful sight of my first-borne. I was in awe at the wonder of new life and perfectly formed being that was my daughter.

Youth

“What a weary time those years were, to have the desire and the need to live but not the ability”. – Charles Bukowski

At seventeen, fuelled with false confidence, I assumed I'd sail through my driving test. I told my girlfriend Mandy I'd pick her up from work afterwards. The test seemed to go well and convinced I'd passed with flying colours, was shocked when the examiner said, “I'm going to fail you for driving too fast.”

‘Ridiculous,’ I thought, feeling resentful towards the grim authority figure. My rebellious self, refused to be controlled and I drove the ancient Ford that I'd bought for £25 to meet Mandy as arranged.

“Oh well done! You passed,” she beamed. “Well actually no,” I said, now feeling rather guilty.

Two months later, my overconfidence replaced by doubt and anxiety, I somehow passed the retest. It seemed so important to have my own set of wheels as if I had to get somewhere else, be someone else. I was forever moving from one restless moment to the next, though really having no idea where I was going or even who I was.

If the condition of my car was anything to go by, it seemed I was poorly equipped to reach my destination.

Ageing

‘It's not dark yet but it's getting there.’ – Bob Dylan

When I asked my mother what it was like being old, she said, “well I really wouldn't recommend it, yet it's better than the alternative.”

Hopefully we gain some wisdom through the years though mostly getting old is about loss. Loss of loved ones and about things being taken away. By our mid-sixties most have a list of ailments as long as their arm, from worn knee or hip joints, arthritic backs and necks to failing eyesight and hearing. Our looks and health gone, leaving us a shadow of our former selves, as time gallops ever faster over the horizon. Maybe someone spooked the horses.

Death

‘The goal of all life is death, yet in the unconscious every one of us is convinced of our own immortality.’ - Sigmund Freud

My father knew his days were numbered and wanted to take us to the place where he was to be buried, a small churchyard high up on the cliff overlooking West Bay. It was as if he imagined he'd be able to enjoy the view from six foot under.

We climbed the hill together, my father's iron will carrying him up the slope, trying to hide the fact that he was struggling and as usual, refusing help from me.

After he died, at the internment, standing at the graveside in empty silence, I watched as the coffin was lowered gently into that sandy soil and thought to myself, 'only so much time left, no excuses now, I must live my life more fully.'

Yet as the days creep on, here I am following behind, looking out on my own flat sea, caught in the misty predictability of life. At times it's as if I'm just waiting for the clock to run down.