

Forty-two

written by Holly

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By Holly Lisle

I measure the passage of time now in terms of hard-to-get fruit and vegetables – black cherries and avocados, peaches, good Midwestern corn on the cob, apples with local names and real bite, blackberries and nectarines and beefsteak tomatoes, morel mushrooms. I miss the drifting of snow, the budding out of trees, the apple blossoms scattered, first trilliums, first lilacs, digging in the garden, the smell and feel of good earth as it softens, first swimming expeditions, walking ankle-deep in creek water with the forest cathedral-green arched over my head. I miss the first blush of autumn on the hardwoods, the maroons and rubies and sunflower yellows of Ohio woodlands in full autumn, and the friendly, chilly-but-rarely-nasty North Carolina winters.

But time does pass. I missed peach season this year – I don't know how or why, but it left a hole in my time. I am determined to get good corn and eat it – steamed and lightly salted, and maybe with a decadent bit of butter – before that too slips by me.

I am forty-two, and I can't figure out how that happened. Fifteen seemed like it would – should – last forever, riding my bicycle with no hands for miles and strolling through farmers' fields and climbing up and down Ohio hills. Twenty-four seemed like it would last forever, chasing two toddlers and working as a nurse and wondering if I could finish that first book. Thirty-one – that went in a flash, with a second book written, a first book sold. And thirty-two – that was just a blink. Leaving nursing, becoming a full-time writer on a the frailest of hopes – a three-book deal and my own certainty that I could make it.

Forty-two. Optimistically, I could look at this as a halfway mark, or less. Realistically, I probably passed the middle of my life a while ago and failed to acknowledge the moment. I think odd thoughts now; I look at the little knick-knacks that decorate my desk and realize that they are far more permanent than I am. That copies of the first paperback novel of mine in print will still exist when I don't. I thumb my stack of Simaks and Sturgeons and think long thoughts.

We are transient creatures, no matter how permanent we seem to ourselves at any moment. Lost in moments of deep focus, time stops for us – time does not exist when I write. But that only means it picks up its pace when I step away from the story. The kids have grown so fast – one is an adult now, and that thought still stuns me. The people in my life have changed, so many lost, so many gone away. I wonder if I will have my hills and seasons and garden again someday.

And the stories. How will I write them all, and who will read them? And is there anything else I haven't done with my life that is still waiting? What clues have I missed? What have I left undone?

The twenties were all about confidence and chasing forward, and my thirties were all about getting things done. So far, the forties seem to be about this damnable itch at the back of my mind that somewhere, somehow, I have left the iron on and I need to figure out where I left it, so I can turn it off.

If I could get them, I would take a million more black cherry seasons. I do not think I would ever tire of the passage of days, the movement of seasons, the change of light in the hills, the comforting sound of rain on a roof, rain streaking down a window. I do not think I will ever be ready not to be here. But I am forty-two. And maybe that changes, too.

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