

# Little Toffee Apple

Toast and apples for breakfast. One year on, toast and apples, apples and toast. Early, minus one and sunglasses today, the winter sun no match for my blue tint strip and visor. I take my mug of coffee in the car. Mum's sleeping in – Best Daughter In The World! Mist lies in valleys but when it reaches me through air vents it's warm, a strong hand on my chest, one on the wheel. Stagnant. Damp. I check the footwell for a forgotten apple core, green spores on the windscreen. I can't see any but I touch the glass. He's gone. Cold.

Outside. Fog kisses my cheeks and temples, is it him? Best Daughter In The World! I wrap my fingers round the last present he bought me; feel its warmth, warmth. I must walk from here. Root Root Head up Root. It's easier to follow winter footpaths. The wooded trip down to the church by the sea is without red skins (that shock and bleed) and broken ankles. Twisted, misshapen roots and wind-sharp bracken are here but they don't hide behind green foliage or autumn leaves, don't grab me. On the left, the old orchard. Look hard to see a man in the shape of my daddy, hugging, doing a facedown snow-but-it-was-once-grass angel, swimming breaststroke in morning apple dew, fingers in dirt, getting as close to the brown, as close to the core, as close to his apples as possible. Compost. Now there's nothing left but bones of a man haunted by the sound of his apples. Dr

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On a good night you can hear his cry. Through the little trees it comes: Best Daughter In The World! Call to me again. Murks of green on Royal blue, carbon fibre slaps crushing wave. Call to me, I dare you. As some weather comes in I hear the lifeboat go out, wind sprint through my hair; take with it loose strands. If a crow crosses my path do I await the same fate as when a black cat does the same? What if Crow catches one of my loose hairs, mid-flight, beak still open, invisible against the night?

Farther down the path a figure thumps across a field I haven't seen foot fall in years, from the old battlement it comes, a hermit from a shell, and crosses my path up ahead. The familiar figure presents itself to me in all-yellow, I don't want to say golden, then muddy primrose, then brighter, then darker. Whether this is due to the rising light or shadows cast I can't tell. I hope it doesn't lead to bad crop.

More flakes try to fall. He comes forward with his yellow hood up, weaving and ducking along the coastal path. Without asking for anything in return the weather gives him several silhouettes, each with a – a golden point, four cones barely visible, church spires in the distance – I can see St. Martin's.

Lamps out at sea: apples bobbing. An on-shore breeze carries the sound of whitecaps through the trees. It brings something else too: footsteps, his – Teeth diving into the white flesh of the earth. They move with the tide, and the time of day, towards me. Don't shiver. Don't shiver. If at times I can see through the mist, I can't see through the thicket. Feet shuffle, twigs snap, dead boughs creak. Rot talks to me from hollow branches, Have you sat beneath a tree whilst birds rustle above? Yes, I say, It sounds like this: A sky-born symphony of disturbed night creatures; of herring gull, owl and pipistrelle interrupted while they huddle under their leafy duvet; trees that whisper, boots on shingle and waves lap-lapping the shore. Layer upon layer of seafront at dawn. Blue on blue. An audio impasto.

Late morning mist creeps into what's left of the woods making it unclear whether the white I see is dapple light, white horses in the distance or snowfall. The snow – it is snow – is pink against the hue of the stain glass window. Pink as the blood of the ram in the Binding of Isaac.

A weeping canopy, hawthorn and a tree marked for cutting. A public footpath, a forgotten animal trap and a frown at a flake in my eye. One more stile and I'm at the church gate and able to touch the bark of the last apple tree and the graves. The touch of dead moss on his stone is hard, but some south-facing fungus remains velvety, biro-green with water-clogged spores full of winter juice that scream, Push me, push me, until their sponge surface gives in and water spills over his name towards the grass that licks his stone. I break a few more stems; pull them up with my heel as I stand, slip and skid on the ice. I reach out and he supports me, closed position, my cheek a little grazed from the clips of his serif font.

Thistle heads sway, dance, flap like cinnabar moths on brown stalks and rise. They wait for the wind to push them down. Each bend in their stalk risks another break in their stem. It's dangerous work out here with St. Martin performing for the dead. Some people leave flowers. I leave my apple core.

As I put on my gloves I remember holding his hand in that raised white bed for the last time, and all I could think about was how he forced me to peel the Bramleys. How cold one's fingers can get.

Root Root Keep my head up.