

Apples to Apples

by Charlie Brule

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Juliana rested her forehead on the car window, leaving a smudgy residue from the sweat collection on her brow. Even with the air conditioning rippling up her legs and causing her dress hem to flutter, she still felt the results of the sun piercing through the window. Her dog Sammy, a small schnauzer, panted his kibble breath behind her. Tiny whiskers from his shaggy gray beard tickled the back of her neck.

“It is hot isn't it buddy?” she half whispered as she wrapped her arm back attempting to scratch his ears from where she sat. Eventually Sammy tired of standing and she heard his little body collapse with a sigh. Soon his snores matched the hum of the car wheels clipping along the pavement. Aside from the resounding whirring of the car and the vibrations caused by the patchy country road, silence echoed between Juliana and her parents, well her mom, Frank didn't count as her dad. She persistently disconnected herself. Instead her eyes caught the apple orchards parading by like an old nickelodeon, pictures fluttering, slightly disjointed. Her life seemed to pass like those orchards, split and estranged.

“Honey, remember when we used to take you out to pick apples.” A sweet trickle of sound shattered the force field of silence that divided the front and the back seats of the dark blue Honda CR-V. Juliana's only response was to change her focus from the window to the gray pine tree hanging from the rearview mirror, reading the script font over and over. *New Car Smell*

“Juliana, you answer your mother when she speaks to you.”

She rolled her eyes, shifting her position once again. Her eyes returned to the window as her head stayed propped against her hand. The black chipping nail polish dug into her cheek. Ladders littered the field of trees. People were apple picking, and just as her mother suggested, Juliana did remember going into those fields on a

warm autumn day. Her free hand ran through her slightly knotted hair, capturing the stray black-brown strings at her knuckles.

She was young in her memory of the orchards. She was young and they were all together.

She shifted her mouth and bit her lower lip.

She was on her dad's shoulders, reaching for the red delicious orb just beyond her fingertips.

"Are you listening to me?" Frank's voice splintered Juliana's memory.

Her mouth felt dry as a slick film collected on her tongue. A greasy film accumulated on her palms as her nerves swelled. Her now dried lips parted, only to be closed firmly by her jaw. She would not be provoked by this outsider.

