

APPLES

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I can't remember how to count anymore. Once I get to the number eight my mind goes blank.

Six is my favourite number because it is my age, I wonder how long I can be this age for.

Hopefully a bit longer.

I haven't been to school since Daddy stopped paying the bills last summer. I don't miss school, because every time I went I would be itching to come home and be happy. Now I can sit in my treehouse all day and count my eight, and more, apples in my picnic basket. Sometimes I get bored though. It isn't easy to have nothing to do other than sit in my treehouse all day and count my big basket of orange apples. Daddy's wellington boots are making a loud squelching noise underneath my treehouse, which means he's coming to tell me to come inside before it gets dark.

"Anna! Come down and don't forget your basket of oranges or they'll go off!" He orders. I find it funny how Daddy calls my apples 'oranges' just because they are orange. I love my Daddy.

We live in a cottage on an old farmland, but we aren't farmers. It's a small cottage with no upstairs and it is just for the three of us, nobody else. As soon as I walk through the wooden back door I can smell Mam's favourite drink again. It smells like nail varnish remover and I don't like it. Daddy has made dinner for us; a shepherd's pie with cheese on top, my favourite. I eat it in less than seven minutes—Daddy timed me—but Mam hasn't touched hers at all. She has

sat on the end chair with a huge upside-down smile on her face and purple around her eyes the whole time.

Daddy shares a chocolate bar with me for desert and Mam runs into the toilet after her first bite of the pie. She even drops her favourite glass with her favourite drink on the way. It sounds like she is getting sick. Probably because the pie is cold, and nobody likes to eat cold food that is supposed to be warm. Daddy looks sad and it makes me a little bit sad because I loved his dinner, but Mam didn't appreciate it.

"Why don't I tuck you into bed? It's getting really late sweetheart." I nod even though I am not even a tiny bit tired. He tucks me in extra gently than normal and kisses my forehead. "I love you, don't ever forget that." His face doesn't seem either happy or sad, so I close my eyes and wait for him to leave. I stare at my ceiling for hours and let my mind wander. I picture me and my Daddy in an even bigger home, with a huge treehouse in the back garden and no mucky grass to get my only runners dirty. It puts a big, big smile on my face and I giggle a little bit. Oh, and Mam would be there too, I just nearly forgot about her for a second.

Mam and Daddy are fighting again. I don't know what about, but Daddy sounds scarily angry, and he's never angry, so Mam must've done something bad. I don't know why Mam starts fights all the time, it doesn't make me, or anybody else happy at all! They're both shouting quite loud and my door is shaking on its hinges from the noise. I can't make out what they're saying.

I sneak out of my bed and slip my mucky runners on. It must not be that late because the sun is only setting now. I climb out of my little window, bringing some paper and crayons with me. I want to have something else to do other than count my basket of apples. I reach the tree

house and my mucky runners are even dirtier than before, they're my only pair so it kind of upsets me. I begin to climb up to ladder on the few steps that aren't broken, and I get so excited to draw on my paper that I climb really fast! I don't really think what to draw on my paper, I just do whatever I want because I can.

Night comes. A dirty, wet, black night. Daddy always says summer in Ireland is worse than the winter. I'm way too happy with my crayons and silence to go back, so I decide to stay out until morning. They won't wake up until late anyway.

I wake up and water is dripping on my nose from the holes in the roof. It's very annoying. My drawing got ruined from the rain and I get very upset. I want to make a new one to show my Daddy, so I leave my treehouse and head home. I climb back into my little window as quick as possible to avoid the rain. It's a lot quieter than it was a few hours ago. I can't tell what time it is, but it's probably around breakfast time because I'm very hungry. I'm a lot more tired than I am hungry, so I get into my freezing cold bed, with my damp socks on, to keep my feet warm obviously, and go to sleep for a few more hours.

After a while, I get up and go into the kitchen to see if there is anything to eat for breakfast. Daddy is sitting in the kitchen on our dinner table. He doesn't turn to look at me. I go about the presses in search for food and find a handful of cereal in a box. The milk is a day out of date, but it isn't curdled so it's okay.

I sit beside Daddy on the table and I start to eat my breakfast. He smells like Mam and I don't like it. He hasn't said 'Good Morning' to me yet, which is weird, but I continue to eat

anyway. He's holding one of Mam's favourite glasses and he has the exact same upside-down smile that she has when she holds her glasses. They obviously are bad luck or something.

I finish my cereal and still feel hungry, so I take an apple out of my basket, bring it into my room, and begin drawing again for my Daddy, because I love him.

I don't know what to draw yet, so I look out of my little window for some help to get ideas. There's a new pile of muck and a shovel at the side of the house and it looks ugly, so I just decide to draw me and my Daddy in our big imaginary house with more than two bedrooms and a big treehouse.

I finish my drawing, but I don't forget Mam this time! I draw her in her bedroom, asleep, because that's where she is right now even though it seems really, really late in the morning. I peel the orange skin off of my apple and smile the happiest smile I've had in ages! I love apples!