

Growing Orchard Communities

COMMUNITY ORCHARD TOOLKIT



A Wassail Story – the apple tree man

There was this hard-working chap that was eldest of a long family, see, so when his dad died there wasn't anything left for him. Youngest gets it all, and he gave bits and pieces to all his kith; but he don't like eldest, see, so all he lets him have is his dad's old dunk (donkey), and an ox that was gone to anatomy (a skeleton), and a tumbledown cottage with two or three ancient old apple trees where his dad had lived with his grandfer.

The chap doesn't grumble but he goes on cutting grass along the lane, and the old dunk began to fatten, and he rubs the ox with herbs and says the old words, and the old ox he perks himself up walks smart, and then he turns his beasts into the orchard, and those old apple trees begin to flourish a marvel. But all this work doesn't leave him time to find the rent. Oh yes, the youngest has to have his rent. Dap on the dot too!

Then one day the youngest comes into the orchard and says, "Twill be Christmas Eve come tomorrow, when beasts do talk. There's a treasure hereabouts we've all heard tell, and I'm set to ask your dunk where it is. He mustn't refuse to tell me. You wake me just afore midnight and I'll take a whole sixpence off the rent."

Come Christmas Eve, the chap he gave the old dunk and ox a bit extra and he fixed a bit of holly in the shippen (cattle-shed), and he got his last mug of cider, and mulled it in the ashes, and went out to the orchard to give it to the apple trees.

At nightfall, who should come wandering into the orchard but the little cat from down Tib's Farm. Not much more than kitten, her were, dairymaid of a cat. And you know what they say about curiosity and the cat? Well here she were, wandering about the orchard in the 'owl-light' when out popped the Apple-Tree Man! And he said to the cat, "You get on home, my dear! This is no place for you. There's folks coming tonight to pour cider through my roots and fire guns through my branches. You get on home, and don't you come back here before St.Tib's Eve!"

Well the little kitten ran off with her tail stiff with fright. Properly scared, she were and she didn't come back at nightfall, never no more – 'cause she didn't know when St. Tib's Eve were! When the older brother came, the Apple-Tree Man was a-waiting for him and he calls to the chap and he says, "You take a look under this great diddicky root of ours. You'll find a chest full of the finest gold. 'Tis yours and no one else's", he says. "Put it away safe and bide quiet about it". So the chap did that. "Now you can go and call your brother", says the Apple-Tree Man, "'Tis midnight."

Well, the the youngest brother he ran out in a terrible hurry-push and sure enough the dunk's a-talking to the ox. "You know this great greedy fool that's a-listening to us, so unmannerly, he wants us to tell him where the treasure is hid to'" "And that's where he won't ever get it", said the ox, "'cause someone has taken it already!"

You can hear Taffy telling this story on his CD "Tell Someone a Story for Christmas". Check it out here <http://www.taffythomas.co.uk/frame1.html>

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