

**Matthew Ritchie**

**About The Family Farm**

It was the end of January, Saturn was in the house. Angled shafts of soft winter twilight slanted through blurred glass, illuminating the ghosts cast out by the visitors' breath in the empty rooms. There was no electricity or heat in the old farmhouse. With its stone floors, oil lamps, root cellars and blackened hearths, it was a frozen relic from another time. A past accelerating away at a thousand miles an hour. The farmland where my great-grandfather had grown apples had been sold to make way for a new thing. With typical family foresight, he had declined the opportunity to buy the land some years earlier, since he was making a healthy profit just leasing it. After all, there was always more farmland. Now the land had been sold to the government for use as an airport, soon to be known as "Heathrow." The massive explosion of the suburban zone around Heathrow meant there was suddenly no more farmland to rent, not around there anyway.

How do you like them apples?

Just another family story, we've all got them. Failure, violence, abandonment, genetic deformities, madness, depressions and drownings. What family cannot lay claim to a rich and storied past, since in the end, we're all related. We're all kissing cousins, whose common ancestors were migrants swept from the sea on the great plume of clearances that forced generations from their ancient homes and ancestral ways. Their stories: the wounded king and his wasted land, the green man and the severed head, the cauldron of plenty and the great hunt, came with them and were, like their tellers, changed by the new world. It was the time of the "tuirgin," the transmigratory cycle of investigative experience. A circuit from form to form, an endless and circular chain of birth and rebirth. Their sign was the unraveled knot, that twists into a labyrinth, that grows into a serpent that consumes itself. DNA, the coiled dimensional instruction book that can build a living world from dust and as easily dissolve it back again.

Above all, they were adaptable: they became shape-shifters, speakers of tongues, survivors. Mountain lions, marmosets, parrots, goats, coypu, salamanders, peacocks,

antelope, porpoises, mole-rats, foxes, pigeons, crocodiles, otters, zebra, chameleons, ducks, rats, kangaroos, herons, manatees, frogs, eagles, platypi, bears, tigers, penguins, dogs, okapi, pigs, squirrels, rabbits and on and on and on, always changing, becoming everything, every possibility, every dream of survival. And of course, in the end, they became the monkeys.

Through it all, they carried their secret ocean inside them. The hidden sea that connects us all, whose tropical and sluggish tides ebb and flow through the caldera of the skull, trawling the shoals of memory, leaving driftwood carved in fantastic and familiar shapes. A sea filled with iron, salt and lust. You can't leave your blood behind.

In 1687, the final volume of Newton's *Principia* was published. The story of the young Newton observing a falling apple and deducing, in a moment of revelation, the existence of gravity is almost certainly fabricated. The true nature of gravity is also still open to question. Although the tidal effects of that mysterious force can be felt everywhere, the means of transmission remain hidden, an invisible ocean of "gravitons" still waiting to be found. They are, like ninety percent of the universe, still missing from our ambit.

How do you like them apples?

The boundary between "pure" quantum information and the real world is a threshold environment, inside it, new narrative conventions are constantly evolving to handle the possible outcomes of all that mutability. The polymorph inside us, the trans-human, routinely sublimates the body, inscribing it into space and time. Ontology becomes architecture; the X-Y-Z axes become indices of possibility. Space must be considered foremost as a potential resource. Categories like inside and outside, order and disorder, are an option rather than a necessity. The geometry of space-time is inside us, is us, growing geometrically stronger the smaller it gets. At the heart of things; on the quantum threshold where the atomic lattice dissolves back in to the universal primary material, a dance through multiple dimensions takes place in double time. Gravity folds into waves; energy and matter swap places and apples, airplanes and monkeys are all equally likely, just waiting for that secret tide to blow them into being. We change and

change again, growing along invisible lines of dimensional adaptation, as that familiar wind blows at our back.

Back at the farm, the geometry of the house shifted as a stern north-easterly leaned in hard against the ancient frame. The house had been built, like its owners, only well enough to last a certain amount of time.

The builders and their predecessors, the Normans, Saxons, Danes, Romans, Celts, Picts and the stone age peoples who came before even them, too young and carefree to have had names, had worked this land hard for thousands of years. No molecule of it had not felt the greedy caress of hands, not been used and reused. Foreign organisms had been introduced, abandoned, and replaced over and over again, until finally, the apogee of agriculture had been reached. The apple is the hardest of all fruits to cultivate from the wild, the very summit of the great farming civilizations.

Now the land quivers under the buffeting winds of the jet streams, the windows are shaken by the sonic booms. Less than three hundred years from Newton in Cambridge to the Wrights at Kittyhawk. Another revelation, an eye opening. The gleaming wet pupil so soft and different from the skin that covers it that it seems like a wound seen in a dream, a priceless jewel dropped in from a different order of being. Flight, a revelation, the unbelievable inversion of the universal descent. The renunciation of gravity, converted back and up through pressure, mass and energy, into a hurricane of dreadful and sublime desire, a storm that heralds endless and total change.

The nor'easter got into the attic through a missing slate and wrestled with the old timbers for a while. The house creaked and groaned halfheartedly, as if it couldn't decide whether it was fed up with waiting to die, or was already dead, with a few choice words for the living. You've felt that wind.

On certain days, when just walking down the street feels like you're swimming in blood. It is your future, waiting to fall.