



Tigger Apples

A beloved cat leaves a gift. By S.E. Ingraham



When our girls were younger, we lived in a bungalow in an older neighborhood that had an established vegetable garden. It also had one beautiful flowering tree. It was the only nonproducing plant of the garden, a young apple tree growing almost smack dab in the center.

True urbanites, we wouldn't even have known it was an apple tree if it wasn't for our garden-savvy neighbor who identified it the first summer we lived there, telling us in his rich Scottish accent, "Ah, 'tis a pretty tree that one. A shame it nae bears fruit a'tall."

We didn't much care. There were three other apple trees in

the yard, in addition to a damson plum, an apricot that also never produced, and a prolific patch of raspberry canes.

The garden itself was decidedly fruitful. Since we lived on the lip of the Arctic Circle, as we joking referred to Edmonton, summer crops were iffy. We could always count on beets and carrots to perform admirably; tomatoes and zucchini weren't so reliable. If a long, hot summer gave us good tomatoes, it also gave us an abundance of zucchini. We would dole the excess out to our friends, saying, "Would you like a few of our tomatoes? You may have three—if you take six zucchinis."



It was our fourth or fifth summer in that house when our grand dame of a Persian started showing signs of slowing down. Tigger was a snaggle-toothed, well-traveled, eighteen-year-old cat who had never really been sick, so it was shocking to see her suddenly old. My husband and I had adopted Tigger when we lived in Brockville, Ontario, when she was but a kitten. Following my husband's career as a survey engineer, she had moved east to Newfoundland with us, then to Toronto briefly, west to Calgary, and after Calgary north to finally settle in Edmonton. Our girls had never known a life without Tigger, and cantankerous as she had become, they loved her dearly.

One morning, my husband came to me early and said that if I wanted to say good-bye to the cat, I should probably come downstairs: She had crawled into a box and was breathing shallowly. I went and sat with her, patted her gently, and kept my hand on her. It was as if she had waited for me, for soon she drew her last.

We decided to bury our old cat in the garden. The girls suggested that under the flower tree would be nice. We had given up calling it an apple tree: The thing never bore any apples. Even the apricot had finally given in and begun producing absolutely-to-die-for golden gems. (According to our Scottish gardening expert next door, it had only been waiting for someone else to plant another, pollinating apricot in the vicinity.)

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We had recently read Judith Viorst's marvelous book of a family pet's memorial, *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney*. So our girls decided they wanted to list ten nice things about Tigger at our service. And somewhere I'd heard about the idea of putting messages in balloons and then releasing the balloons during a service so the messages would float heavenward to the deceased.

The girls thought that was a grand idea. My husband looked at me like I'd taken leave of my senses or was a parenting genius: I couldn't decide which. It was probably the former, but pretending it was the latter, I helped the girls make notes and lists. They wanted to make both, so they could put their notes in the balloons and read their lists at the service. They were catching onto this funeral business in a big way.

However, it soon became apparent that I hadn't quite thought things through . . .



he afternoon of the memorial was bright and breezy. My husband had dug a cat-sized hole under the apple tree. And each girl had prepared five balloons and a list with "Five Nice Things About Tigger" written on it.

The four of us gathered solemnly in the garden. I said a few words about what a great cat Tigger had been, how loyal and long-lived, then we helped the girls, who were just learning to read, recite their parts. Their father then set the cardboard box that held the cat into the hole. We all shoved earth in, packed it down firmly, and added a little pile of stones on top. Casey, our younger girl, gently laid sweet peas she had picked from the back fence on the stones.

According to her older sister, Joanna, "The Cat Came Back" was Tigger's favorite song, so we launched into that silly, never-ending ditty. Then we all bowed our heads to meditate about our dear cat, and the girls let go of their balloons.

It was then I realized that it hadn't occurred to me to have the balloons filled with helium!

Fortunately, the breeze lifted them up some, so they at least went over the fence and into our next-door neighbor's yard. My husband quickly encouraged the girls to keep their eyes respect-

fully closed and hum “Amazing Grace” with him. I scurried over to the next yard. Our neighbor started sounding off,

“Och balloons? Wot’s with all these balloons? Oh, hi there, lass. Are these yours then?”

I put my fingers to my lips to shush him and said as softly as I could, “Could you just pop them, please? Our cat died, see, and they’re supposed to be going up to heaven . . .”

I’ve got to hand it to him, he caught on immediately. Blue eyes twinkling behind his glasses, he smiled broadly, gathered the balloons, and took them into his garage, well out of sight of our children. He did the popping in there, I suspect. We never spoke of the matter again.



ut Tigger had one more surprise for us. The spring after her death, the garden apple tree bloomed beautifully, as always. We all commented on how lovely it was and how pleased Tigger would be to know that’s where we planted her. Later that spring, though, we were astounded to see that everywhere a blossom fell off, an apple began to grow.

“About time,” my husband said. “Probably crab apples.”

I had to agree. Crab apples are pretty common around here.

But as the summer wore on, the apples kept growing and growing. Before we knew it, they were huge. *Probably cooking apples*, I told myself. *They’re such a greenish yellow. Still, better than nothing.*

Imagine our delight when we bit into one apple and found it to be absolutely delicious—as crisp and sweet as any Macintosh. And the tree was laden with them.

We’ve never figured out what type of apples they are, but every year since, just as the blossoms follow the melting snow, the apples follow the blossoms. I’ve never seen a tree bear so much fruit.

The girls call them Tigger Apples. They say they started to grow because we buried our cat there. I’m not sure I disagree.

Tigger Apples, it is. ❖

