

## The Orchards Estate

Dear Ms. Coram,

Something happened last night. Okay, I'd been on the cider, catching up with school-friends.

But I swear this is true.

I took a short-cut through an estate. Box-fresh, decked with Bowdler Homes flags. When I left for Uni, that land was Orchards Golf Course. Before that, I don't know.

On Pippin Way, I saw a pub I didn't recognise: The Green Man. Looked seedy. A bag-lady in a red headscarf sat outside. She pointed at a tree.

"Pick me an apple."

So I did. She took a silver knife from her pocket, peeled the skin in one ribbon and dropped it over her shoulder. Then cut the fruit crossways and offered half to me. The flesh was bittersweet, like when you go back to a half-forgotten home.

"They name the streets for the lost," she murmured. "Is it guilt, or gloating? The road-signs are grave-markers. Another one bites the dust. That's all we'll bite, soon..."

I walked down Pearmain Drive, Dabinett Crescent, Pendragon Close. After sunset, a mist began to rise. In the blue half-light, the houses faded. I wandered, woozy, under lichen-silvered trees. I saw a crowd dancing, singing, clashing pans. A leaf-crowned girl called to

me, "Tonight, the land remembers!" She waved her apple-red scarf and laughed. The rest... I can't explain. You wouldn't believe me.

I don't know what it means. But if I join the Bowdler Homes Graduate Fast-Track Programme, I'll never find out. So I won't attend Induction tomorrow.

Sorry,

K. Hart