

“The Gargoyle Overhead”,

EXCERPT REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION OF NAPOLEON PUBLISHING

Gargoth’s Story, 1664: The empty basket

The boy reached gingerly into the grass, and picked up the half-eaten apple core. He left the basket of apples he was collecting at the bottom of the apple tree, and walked toward the church.

“That’s the third time this week,” he said to himself. “Whoever is doing this is a really good shot.” As if to remind himself of this fact, he rubbed the back of his head where the apple core had just hit him.

He brushed off his breeches. He looked carefully up into the church parapet, still holding the apple core. He raised his hand to shade his eyes from the glare of the setting sun.

“HULLOO,” he finally shouted. “I know you’re up there. There are plenty of apples for everyone, you don’t have to throw them at me.”

He waited and listened, but there was no answer. So he tried again.

“HELLO! Whoever you are, you’d better come out now and give yourself up. I know you’ve been throwing apples at me when I’m out here in the orchard.”

ZING! An apple core whizzed right at him. He ducked behind a tree just in time to hear it smack the other side, hard. He stuck his head out from behind the tree, and shouted, “STOP IT! What are you doing?”

At that moment, he saw the basket of apples he had just picked disappear behind a tree. He jumped up to run toward it, but quickly had to take cover.

Someone was throwing the entire basket of apples at him. Each time he stuck his head out trying to catch a glimpse of them, an apple whizzed by, sending him ducking for cover.

ZING! ZING! ZING! A torrent of apples was being pelted at him. The entire apple orchard was ringing with the sound of apples smashing against the tree he was hiding behind.

His heart was starting to pound. Who was doing this? Who was wasting an entire basket of apples throwing them at him, and why?

And who was such a good shot?

Suddenly the apples stopped flying, and the boy heard someone calling him. It was his father.

“Philip! Philip where are you? The cart is loaded, we’re ready to go! Where are you hiding, boy?”

Philip stood up and peered around the side of the tree.

“Here Father! I’m over here in the orchard.” Philip moved away from the tree and ran toward the spot where he had left his apple basket. His father and he reached the basket at the same moment.

It was empty, and lying on its side. A few trampled apples lay nearby.

“What happened here Philip?” his father asked, concerned.

“I... I really don’t know Father,” Philip said.

“Well, where are the apples?”

“I, I don’t know. They’re everywhere. They’re all over the orchard Father,” he said, confused and upset.

His father looked around. He saw apples everywhere, smashed against the trees, and many piled up and ruined at the bottom of one particular tree. Philip's father gave him a hard stare.

“If you're going to do target practice, Philip, please use the river stones and not food for our table. Every apple you've wasted here could have been saved and dried for food in the winter ahead. You will have extra chores to do tonight.”

His father never really got mad, but Philip could tell he was displeased as he marched back toward the waiting horse and cart beside the old church gate.

There would be no apples for lunch tomorrow. There would be fewer dried apples for the winter ahead.

As Philip bent down to retrieve the empty apple basket and follow his father to their old cart, he heard the most amazing sound.

It was like a creaky cartwheel groaning uphill under a great weight. Or maybe, just maybe, someone high up in the church tower was laughing.