Harvest Festival Debut

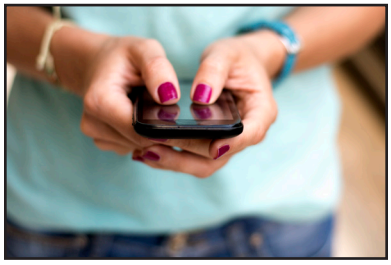
In early September, the Harvest Festival at Apple Creek kicks off the farm's busiest season. Apple Creek is a working farm, orchard, and market located in Richfield, Ohio. Richfield is near the beautiful Cuyahoga (*KY-ah-HOE-gah*) Valley National Park and acres of fertile farmland. The Apple Creek Farmer's Market opens to the public in early summer, and the Harvest Festival is the highlight of the season. It welcomes the arrival of a beautiful rainbow of local produce, including apples, sweet corn, pumpkins, and more.

Every year, Jesse Jones drives down from Cleveland with his daughter Tamara to attend the festival. They enjoy the live music, fresh corn on the cob, hot apple cider, and even a hayride around the orchard. After enjoying

the farm's festivities, Jesse and Tamara always load up on produce, especially apples. They bring them home to Jesse's wife, Michelle, who always makes a delicious apple pie.

Jesse looks forward to the trip with his daughter. In the past, Tamara always loved the journey to the farm. But this year, she has just turned 13 and has other ideas.

"Dad, do I have to go? It's going to be so boring," Tamara says, hardly looking up from her cell phone.



"What do you mean boring? You always loved going to the farm before. Just last year, you were jumping up and down with excitement," Jesse says.

"I'm not a little kid anymore. I think I'm getting too old for hayrides and corn mazes."

“What about the band? You love the band,” Jesse replies.

Tamara sighs with exasperation, but her dad is right. She does love the Apple Creek Bluegrass Band. They play traditional favorites such as “I’ll Fly Away,” “Jolene,” and “Cripple Creek,” along with contemporary country songs.

Tamara is an aspiring guitar player. She is a country music fan and is learning to play some of the songs herself. She’s always loved all kinds of music. She gets it from her dad, who is also a music lover. He plays guitar and banjo. Jesse was in a band when he was younger.

“I guess I’ll go, but just to hear the band,” Tamara says.

“And, to help me carry all of the produce we’re going to buy,” Jesse reminds her.

“Why doesn’t Mom ever go?” Tamara asks.

“I always thought it was nice for the two of you to spend the day together. And, to be honest, I’ve always enjoyed having the whole day to myself. I catch up on some reading and talk on the phone with a few of my friends,” Michelle explains.

On Saturday morning, Jesse and Tamara eat a light breakfast to save room for all the treats they’ll have at the Harvest Festival. Tamara chooses an outfit to fit the mood. Cut-off jean shorts, a red-and-white gingham top, and a red paisley bandana tied in her hair. If she has to spend all day at the farm, she may as well look cute doing it.

While Tamara is getting ready, Jesse secretly places his banjo in the car and puts a blanket over it.

“What are you doing with that?” Michelle asks.

“Oh, just a little surprise for Tamara,” Jesse says with a grin.

The drive is a little over an hour. Jesse and Tamara pass through the urban landscape of Cleveland. This is followed by suburbs with shopping centers. Finally, they reach farmland with cornfields and green pastures dotted with brown cows, red barns, and farmhouses. When they arrive at the Apple Creek Farm, the parking lot is packed.

“Ugh, there are so many people here,” Tamara says.

“Maybe there will be cute boys,” Jesse teases her.

“Dad, don’t be gross,” Tamara says, rolling her eyes. She secretly has a crush on the lead singer of the Apple Creek Bluegrass Band, but she would never tell her dad that.

Jesse finally finds a parking spot in the back corner of the overflow lot.

“We have to walk soooo far,” Tamara complains.

“The exercise is good for us!” Jesse says cheerfully.

They get a beautiful view of the apple orchards while walking up to the festival.

Tamara can hear the band playing in the distance. She feels her grumpiness melting away to the sound of upbeat music. As they get closer, she

realizes something is missing. The lead singer of the band is not there. She wonders if he's taking a break, but then she overhears a conversation between two people in the audience.

"I heard Austin Wilson moved to Nashville to pursue a solo career."

"I heard that, too! I wish him the best, but the band just isn't the same without him."

"I guess they couldn't find another singer in time for the Harvest Festival."

Tamara can't help feeling a little disappointed. She came here to see the band—especially Austin Wilson. Although she has to admit, moving to Nashville to pursue a music career is very exciting. She daydreams about doing so herself.

“Tamara, is your head in the clouds?” Jesse asks.

“Sorry, Dad! I was just thinking about how I might like to move to Nashville to play music someday,” Tamara says.

“Keep practicing, and you just might,” he says with a smile. “You have to promise to come back and visit your mom and me, though.”

Tamara and Jesse get in line to buy roasted corn on the cob and apple cider. The corn tastes fresh and extra sweet. Tamara never liked frozen corn and would pick it out of soup or a casserole, insisting she didn’t like corn. But, the first time she tried corn on the cob, she was smitten. There’s nothing else in the world like it.

After enjoying their snacks, Jesse and Tamara browse the market stands. The vendors' booths are overflowing with pumpkins, acorn squash, and sweet corn. There are apples of every variety: Macintosh, Gala, Red Delicious, Gold Rush, and shiny green Granny Smith. They load up their shopping baskets with fruits and vegetables, making sure to include the tart Granny Smith apples Michelle likes best for her apple pie.

When they finish shopping, Jesse suggests that Tamara sit down and watch the band while he carries the groceries to the car.

"Don't you need my help?" Tamara asks.

"I'll be fine. Besides, they're playing your favorite song!"

The band starts playing “Oh! Susanna,” a song Tamara loved as a child. She’d toddle around the house singing it, almost before she could talk. It’s an instrumental version since the band is missing its singer.

Jesse loads all the shopping bags on his arms, pretending they’re not too heavy. A little while later, he returns, holding his banjo case.

Tamara looks surprised. Before she can say anything, the guitar player in the band steps up to the microphone to make an announcement.

“Our lead singer has moved to Nashville to pursue his dream. Luckily, my old friend and former bandmate Jesse Jones is here. He’s gonna sing a few songs with us. Maybe pick a few on his banjo, too!”

Jesse walks up on stage. He stands in front of the microphone, starts plucking his banjo, and sings "I'll Fly Away."

Tamara doesn't know if she should be mortified or proud. She's a little bit of both. But she looks around and sees the crowd dancing and singing along joyfully. Her dad really is talented.

Tamara looks up and notices her dad motioning for her to join him on stage. She blushes and then hops up onto the stage and begins singing along. It's her first time singing on a stage in front of a live audience.

"This really is the best Harvest Festival trip ever," Tamara thinks.

The End