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The Best Apple Tree of All

Mary Graham Bonner

Every spring, the old apple tree had the most beautiful blossoms in the orchard. And every summer its apples were sweeter than any other tree's. Nobody knew why — until one drowsy afternoon.

There was a hammock strung under the apple tree, and it looked so comfortable that a man settled himself in it and dozed off in the warm June air. And as he drifted between sleep and waking, he heard the apple tree talking.

"Now then," the tree was saying to the small green apples on its boughs. "You must grow up fine and ripe. Keep those little seeds warm and brown — if the seeds are good and brown, children can eat as many as they like without any harm. And turn toward the sun, all of you! Let him warm your cheeks and make you red."

As the man listened, he thought the apples seemed to grow a shade rounder and redder even as he watched.



"You see," the tree went on, "we have a special honour. On the day the first apple ripens, the Fairy Queen herself comes — very early, before anyone else is awake — and she sits in our branches with all the little fairies. The first ripe apple goes to her, and some more go to the fairies. And the fairies are far too kind to take our apples away from real people — so we grow a great many extra ones, secret fairy apples that no one can see."

The tree paused, almost shyly.

"I have also been practising my bow. I want to make a very fine bow when the Queen arrives. So I must practise. And the Sun — he's the greatest help to us in all the world, such a dear old soul — if we flatter him a little, he shines down all the harder."

At that, the man felt the sun warm on his face, generous and bright — and he woke up. The hammock swung gently. Above him the apple tree waved its branches in the breeze, and he was quite certain it was practising its bow.

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