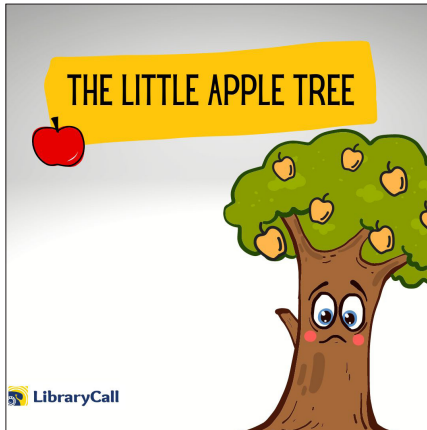


# The Little Apple Tree



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adapted for LibraryCall*

To listen call:

In a thriving apple orchard full of trees heavy with ripening fruit, a little apple tree sighed. Her apples remained small, green, and hard. She couldn't help but compare herself to the apple trees around her; their fruit was already so round and red.

"Since these are my first apples, perhaps they will ripen more slowly," she thought. "I must be patient. And then hopefully, before long, my apples will begin to turn red, too."

So day after day, she watched for signs of any red color to appear on the surface of her fruit. Time seemed to drag on slowly.

One day, in the middle of all this waiting, the apple tree heard curious little squawks coming from inside her branches. Soon, a bluejay with a worm in her mouth came flying in through the thick leaves and landed in the nest she had built deep inside the little apple tree's canopy.

"My babies have hatched!" she cried. The nest had been so well hidden in the branches, that even the little apple tree herself had not realized it was there. The eggs had been sheltered from rainstorms, heat, and hungry animals. Happy to realize she was serving a useful purpose, the little apple tree snuggled her branches more closely around the nest.

At last, the baby bluejays grew strong enough to fly. But even after they left their nest, the young birds stayed in the apple orchard and often came to perch in the tree.

Other creatures used the little apple tree as a shelter, too. A chipmunk made his home under a rock at the foot of her trunk, beetles marched up her bark to find leaves for dinner, and songbirds flitted in and out of her branches.

The little apple tree did all she could to support life in the orchard, yet she couldn't stop worrying about her green apples, which still didn't seem to show any sign of ripening.

Many long summer days passed and September arrived. The trees with beautiful red apples seemed to glow in the early autumn light. Soon, workers began to pick the ripe apples and put them into barrels to be sold.

The trees with the red apples laughed and whispered among themselves, and the little tree thought they must be laughing at her with her hard green fruit.

"I wonder if my fruit will ever get ripe," she thought miserably.

As the September days passed, the branches of the trees with red apples began to buckle with the weight of their ripe fruit. Those apples needed to be picked quickly, before they began to drop to the ground and bruise. Workers picked barrel after barrel of the rich harvest.

Soon the little apple tree was left alone with her branches full of useless green fruit. She felt impatient and discouraged.

Though the little apple tree's fruit remained green, her apples had actually grown significantly. Her branches were bending almost to the ground with their weight. She tried to shake off some of the apples; it seemed pointless to carry so much inedible fruit. But the apples held tight to her limbs.

October arrived and the clear, cool days of fall grew shorter and shorter. The little apple tree was on her own. The chipmunk was snug in his winter home and the birds had flown south for the winter. The other trees, having finished their work, were preparing for their long winter nap.

By November, the little apple tree no longer paid much attention to her fruit. They still clung heavily to her branches, but she had long ago given up hope that they would become red and delicious. Her apples had become a rusty brown color and she thought they must be rotting.

One day, around the time white frost began to harden the ground at night, the little apple tree heard voices in the orchard. Workers carrying baskets and ladders were walking toward her. To her astonishment, the workers stopped right under her boughs, propped their ladders against her trunk, and climbed up.

"These look perfect!" said a man, dropping apples into his basket with a plunk. "Did you ever see anything more beautiful than this rich golden brown?"

"Russet apples have always been my favorite," said another worker. "I love their sweet, nutty flavor. They may ripen late in the season, but in my opinion, nature saves the best apples for last!"

"Russet apples?" wondered the little apple tree. "Russet is a yellowish brown color. Could it be true that my apples were never meant to turn red?"

She examined the fruit on her branches, and against the intense blue November sky, she saw them in a new light. Her apples no longer appeared to be rotten. Instead, she now saw them as drops of gold.

"Wow," she said. "I didn't realize it, but while the rest of the orchard has gone to sleep, I have been producing these sweet golden apples all along!"

The workers finish picking the last of her apples. The fruit were carried to large bins in the farm cellar, where they would continue to sweeten

during the long winter months.

The little apple tree smiled. It felt good to know her russet-colored apples were perfect exactly as they were. Her work for the year was done, so with a yawn, the little apple tree went to sleep. It was a big job to produce the sweetest apples in the world, and she knew she needed all the rest she could get.