

# When The Apple Trees Blossom

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Regina waved the bee from her face and watched it circle around her in a dizzy path. When she could no longer see it, she ran to the lilac bush and shook it. The last bee had been hovering among the great purple clusters and had fled when she had touched it. Perhaps there would be another one to shoo away if she looked at each purple mass. Carefully she separated the blossoms with her hands and peered into the shadows. There were no more bees, only the scent of the flowers.

Soon tiring of her search, Regina walked with heavy sliding steps toward the house. The grass was soft, and Regina could almost feel it tickle her feet through her cumbersome shoes. In the spring it was always a soft, lush green with enough dampness to make it cool.

"If Grandmother would only let me," she thought. "If she would only let me." She walked to the driveway and kicked at a rock. It went skipping down the hill. Rocks always felt sharp at first, but after a week she could walk down the driveway to the mailbox and back without flinching.

With a sudden gush of courage, Regina ran to the house, opened the screendoor and burst into words. "Grandmother, the grass has been mowed twice, and I won't walk on the rocks."

"No."

"But Grandmother, the lilacs are out and it's warm outside."

"No!"

"The bees are everywhere, and they only leave the hives when it's swarmin' time. Please, Grandmother."

"Genie, I've tol' you time and time again; I can't let you go barefoot yet. When the apple trees blossom, you can

take off your shoes and stockings. Not before."

"It is warm. It's almost hot."

"I never did hear such a piece of nonsense. Like as not there is still ice on the pond. Now stop worrying me about going barefooted and fix yourself some sugar bread."

Regina opened the drawer and cautiously took out the bread knife. The long silver blade looked like Mr. Hessman's corn knife, and she remembered his cutting the corn into tiny cylinders. Mr. Hessman had let Regina try it once.

"What are you doin' to that bread, Genie? You've hacked it into crumbs. You mustn't cut bread like you're killin' rats with a rake."

Grandmother took the knife from Regina and with deft strokes cut two slices. One piece was as smooth as the sand bar by the pond; the other piece, the one cut by Regina, was smooth on one side and as ragged as the gravel driveway on the other.

Poking her finger through the two slices of bread, Regina slipped into the pantry, holding the bread at arm's length in front of her. King Arthur had a shield shaped like a slice of bread; only it had many figures painted on it. His sword was silver with rubies and diamonds on the hilt. King Arthur's picture was on page one hundred and seven in her reader.

With lightning jabs she killed the dragon in the butter jar and spread the butter over her bread, taking care to smooth the rough patches. Plunging the knife into the jar, she heard it scrape the bottom. Regina left it sticking up like a fence post to mark the grave of the monster.



After sprinkling sugar on her bread, Regina put the lid back on the sugar can reluctantly. The sugar had somehow sifted to the floor, and as she walked across it, it made a grinding noise.

She shut the screendoor, ran down the steps, and sat down on the bench beneath the grape arbor. She bit a huge chunk out of both slices of sugar bread. The next time she would put more sugar on it.

After she had finished eating, she wiped her hands on her green plaid skirt and hopped to the barnyard gate on one leg. From her perch on the gate, Regina could see down the slope of the hill to the orchard. The delicate pink blossoms of the peach had been roosting on the naked twigs a week ago, and now they were drooping with weariness. Thought exploded into Regina's mind . . . the apple blossoms might be out now.

Jumping down from the gate, she caught her skirt on a picket and hung there for an instant. Freeing herself, she examined the torn garment.

"Torn again. This time in the back," she said aloud. "I'm glad it's in the white part of the plaid. Grandmother can mend it so as it won't show much."

The skirt was the least important of her worries. It was not fair that their apple trees and peach trees never bloomed at the same time. Sometimes the apple trees were two weeks later, and one year they forgot to bloom at all.

"Grandmother," she screamed toward the house. "Grandmother, I'm gonna take off my shoes and stockin's to cross the ditch. I don't want 'em to get wet. Do you hear me, Grandmother?"

Without waiting for an answer, she pulled the shoes off without untying them. The stockings were wadded into two balls and stuffed into the toe of each shoe.

Regina stood back from the ditch and pitched the shoes in a high arc at the other bank.

Leaning over the edge of the ditch, she managed to fish the shoe out with a stick. The inside was wet, even the stocking. She placed both shoes next to the fat boulder and gathered air into her lungs to explain to Grandmother.

"Grandmother!" Regina stopped; Grandmother could never hear from that distance. It would only be a waste of breath. She took careful steps to the orchard, barely glancing at the peach trees. Regina could hardly hold back the tears; tomorrow they might be out, but not today. Searching the branches was in vain, and she turned to go to the house.

"If Grandmother would only let me . . ." she stopped to put her hand on a plum tree. It was certainly curious how hard it was to tell the difference between plum blossoms and apple blossoms at a distance. Picking up her shoes and a plum blossom in almost one motion, Regina raced toward the house.

"They're out! I can go barefooted now. See, Grandmother!" Regina extended her upturned palm in which lay a squeezed blossom. Grandmother glanced at it, and before she could take it, Regina threw it into the coal bucket.

Setting the soggy shoes by the kitchen range, Regina grasped a handful of cookies from the crystal dish on the table and fled out the backdoor.

"Genie! Come back here. I've lived on a farm for sixty-two years, and I know a plum flower when I see one. Regina."

Through the window she could hear Regina yelling across the Hollow to Mr. Hessman. "Spring is here, Mr. Hessman. Look, I'm goin' barefooted."