

The Incident Of The Apple

JEANNE McCOY

"Well, it's about time," declared Pa, "but it was worth it, I guess."

Pa stood with his feet planted wide apart and his wide-brimmed straw hat grasped loosely in his hand. Little beads of perspiration spotted his forehead. Unconsciously he took a red-checked bandana from his hip pocket and wiped his face and forehead, never once moving his eyes from one object. The heavy scented summer-end breeze carried the smell of hard working horses, of ripe corn pollen, of common garden phlox and red clover. Pa wrinkled his nose and sniffed delightedly, but the only smell that Pa knew was the mouth-watering smell of a ripe apple. High in the tree almost hidden by foliage hung one apple. The varied songs of the mocking bird seemed a fitting accompaniment for Pa's day-dreaming. For the last five years, Pa had babied and coaxed this pet tree of his. It was healthy and well-developed, but never before had there even been the slightest excuse of an apple.

"Boys, boys, come here," hollered Pa. "Come here this minute," he bellowed.

We came right then 'cause Pa's no man to fool with. When he wants something, he wants it right then. Obediently we five stood before him, each of us anxious to be on our way.

"Boys . . . Fred, stand up straight and stop that fidgeting . . . I'm going to town to get that know-it-all Adams to see what kind this apple is. Scott, quit drawing in the dust and listen to me. Now you are not to pick this apple, any of you, for any reason! *Remember, do not pick the apple!*"

Pa turned on his heels and stalked to-

ward the barn leading his team. A few minutes later, out came Pa bringing the horse hitched to the buggy. As he turned down the lane, his parting shout was, "Do not pick the apple!"

The sun had reached its heighth and was starting home when Pa got back. He and know-it-all Adams leaped out of the buggy and ran toward the tree, leaving the horse to stand unhitched. They reached the tree, and there was a long moment of silence. Then, "Boys, boys, come here."

From the tone of Pa's voice we knew we'd better get there on the double or there would be some pretty drastic measures taken.

"Which one of you boys picked the apple?" said Pa in that quiet voice which was so much worse than his bellowing. He started with Fred, looked him up and down, and said, "Did you eat the apple?"

Fred gulped, turned all colors, and stammered, "N-n-no, Sir."

Pa asked each of us, and his looks were worse than any inquisition. Finally my turn came, and Pa said in that treacherously quiet voice, "Scott, did you eat the apple?"

Looking in those icy steel depths of Pa's eyes, I felt my heart begin to pump madly, my hands get cold and wet, and my ears begin to ring.

"Well, answer me, did you?"

Summoning every spark of my manhood, I managed to squeak with my voice ranging higher and higher, "Pa, you said not to pick the apple. I didn't, it's still on the tree. I just ate it and left the core hanging!"