

# the golden apple tree



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Long ago, on an island far away, there was a golden apple tree that grew in the grounds of a castle by the sea. One morning, the three princesses who lived in the castle were walking through the soft grass in the sunshine. The sisters were on their way to gather the golden apples that had fallen during the night to bring to their father, the king, just as they did at the same time every day.

“Today I have a plan to lift Father’s head from his apples,” said Chordia, the eldest of the three princesses.

“Let me guess, could it be a little music maybe?” said Archeria, the youngest of the three, pretending to put a violin under her chin and play it. “It doesn’t matter what you play, Chordia, you know what Father will say...”

“Put the apples in the basket and leave me in peace,” answered Perceptua, the middle sister, mimicking their father’s glum, sullen voice. “He never even looks at us. It’s so sad. I don’t know what we can do.”

“Maybe we should tell the servants not to bring him food any more. That way he would have to leave his chambers, or stay there and starve,” said Archeria with a giggle.

Perceptua gasped, her hands flying to her face in horror at the thought.

“Archeria,” scolded Chordia, “we can’t be cruel. Why don’t you offer to take him hunting?”

Archeria sighed, “I have, I will, I do, but it’s no use. All he cares about are the apples. Unless we chop down the tree, I don’t know how we can make him remember he has three daughters.”

Chordia shot her younger sister a look but did not tell her off again.

“If only he would come sailing with us,” Perceptua said, looking out to where their mother’s sailboat was tethered, bobbing gently on the sparkling waves. “We could take him when the sea is calm. It might help him to feel close to mother again, like it does for us.”

“He is much too terrified of the ocean. Besides, he would never leave his apples,” said Archeri

“How many apples do you think he has in there?” asked Chordia “It must be hundreds by now!”

The king’s chambers were filling with golden apples, each one a beautiful, rich gold, shined and polished by the grieving king. The golden apple tree had been a wedding gift from the people of Blood-Red Island, a distant neighbour of the island on which the princesses lived. It was said that a fire-dragon lived there. The princesses had been taught to sail by their mother and knew the waters well, but they had not dared to leave their father to travel as far as Blood-Red Island for many years.

Archeria didn’t answer her sister and instead ran on ahead to the base of the glorious golden apple tree, a quiver of arrows on her back jiggling as she ran. The tree had thrived in the castle grounds, drinking in the soft, pure water from the soil through its now-deep roots and basking in the sun. It was a magnificent tree with twisted, rich-brown branches and thick, rippled bark. The leaves were plentiful and lush, and every day it would drop golden apples in the night.

Archeria hooked her bow onto her back alongside her quiver and started to search through the grass looking for fallen apples. “I don’t see why Father cares more for the apples than he does for us,” she said. “It’s like he’s gone mad, shut up inside all day, polishing and staring at them all the time.”



“Maybe you’re too young to remember mother properly?” said Chordia, carefully setting her beautiful violin made of maple and cedar wood down in the grass by the tree.

Archeria looked up from her apple search, indignant, and replied: “I do—she had dark, kind eyes and she taught us to sail. Even when she got really sick, she would take us out in the sailboat. I remember Father hated it and paced up and down on the shore calling out for us to be careful.”

“But you don’t remember about the apples?” asked Chordia.

There was a pause while Archeria glared at her but said nothing.

“Tell the story again, Chordia,” said Perceptua, to save her younger sister. Perceptua was always the kindest of the sisters. Like Archeria’s skill with a bow and arrow, and Chordia’s gift of music, Perceptua had her own talent. The middle sister had been born with razor-sharp senses—not just hearing, sight and sound, but also intuition. She could read people and animals well and would always find a way to make peace if she could.



“You know the tree was a wedding gift...” began Chordia, but Archeria cut her off.

“...From the island with the dragon, yes, yes...”

“...But what you may have forgotten is that when it first grew there were no apples. Not one. Mother loved the tree and when she wasn’t sailing she would sit beneath it for hours, staring up at the branches above. Father would join her and she told him that when the first apple came she would polish it and polish it until it shone so brightly she would see her face reflected back.”

“And did she?” asked Archeria, forgetting she had been trying to pretend that she already knew the story.

Chordia smiled, “No, because the first golden apple didn’t fall until the night after mother died and her ashes had been sprinkled beneath it. Father found it the next morning—a pure, real golden apple. He treasured that apple more than anything and thought if he polished it just right that he would be sure to see mother’s face again.”

“That’s so sad,” said Archeria, taking her bow and arrows from her back and putting them next to her sister’s violin.

“So now you can see why we can never chop down the tree and why we must always bring Father his apples,” explained Perceptua gently. “Maybe he will find the one apple that will reflect mother’s face. I would like to see it too.”

“So would I,” agreed Chordia, then added, thoughtfully, “but I would like Father to see us more.”