

Meet Mrs. Applebee

A is for Apple Blossom, St. Anne, and the Angel of God

Once upon a time there was a little boy named Michael who lived with his family in a cabin at the edge of a beautiful woods. One day Michael's mother was having a birthday and he set out in search of the perfect present. "What shall I give my mother for her birthday?" he wondered. He began to walk, searching for just the right thing. He looked in the flower beds that wound their way around the front of the cabin and saw beautiful tulips, roses and daisies. They would make a lovely bouquet for his mother, but he knew that he wasn't allowed to pick flowers from the beds.

As Michael continued to walk along the flower beds he heard a soft rustling in the woods behind his house. "What was that? Probably just a squirrel" thought Michael as he went about his search. Suddenly from behind an Apple Tree there appeared before him a beautiful lady. She wore a flowing dress decorated here and there with plump, red apples. They were so beautiful that Michael had trouble telling if they were real apples or only pictures. But whatever they were, there was definitely something familiar about her dress.

The beautiful lady held out her arms, bidding him to come. Slowly he began to walk toward her. "Who are you?" asked Michael in a small, shy voice. The beautiful apple lady lowered her head and Michael could see a band of green leaves holding back the loose curls which framed her lovely face. "I am Mrs. Applebee. I live here with my children in this magical woods." Michael couldn't believe what he was hearing. How could she live in the woods? There was no room for a house within all of those towering old trees. And what children was she talking about? Michael had never seen a child anywhere near the woods.

"I don't understand," Michael replied politely. "How could you live in the woods and where are your children? I've never seen any children around here." Mrs. Applebee smiled and answered, "That's because you don't know where to look." Suddenly there was a gentle flutter of what sounded like wings up above their heads. The soft sound came from the branches of the Apple Tree. Michael looked above and saw two tiny little creatures sitting on the branch among the apple blossoms. At first look they seemed to be beautiful butterflies, but as he focused his eyes he saw that they were tiny children with fairy wings and they sang a beautiful song.

*Up in the tree we see you, blossom-babies,
All pink and white;
We think there must be fairies to protect you
From frost and blight,
Until, some windy day, in drifts of petals,
You take your flight. You'll fly away!*

*But if we wait with patience,
Some day we'll find
Here, in your place, full-grown and ripe, the apples
You left behind-
A goodly gift indeed, from blossom-babies
To human-kind!*

(From The Complete Book of the Flower Fairies by Cicely Mary Barker)

"These are my children the Apple Blossom Fairies. They live in the Apple Tree and protect the sweet baby blossoms from the wind and cold" said Mrs. Applebee, before Michael had a chance to ask. The older of the two fairies flew down to Michael and when she landed on the soft ground, made a little curtsy and said in a high, sweet voice, "I am the Apple Blossom Fairy and my name begins with the Letter A. I am the first of my mother's children." Suddenly Michael knew what was familiar about Mrs. Applebee's dress. From the tip of her collar down through the lines of her

dainty apron, the form of a Letter A was visible through the folds of her apple dress.

The little fairy handed Michael a beautiful Apple Blossom. "This would be nice to add to your mother's birthday bouquet. I'm sure my brothers and sisters will offer you many more if you like." Michael smelled the sweet, fragrant blossom and looked at Mrs. Applebee with hopeful eyes. "Of course I will take you to meet my other children" Mrs. Applebee agreed. And as she nodded her head her apple earrings bobbed up and down against her golden hair.

"But wait!" The Apple Blossom Fairy crossed her ankles, spun around and sat down gently on the mossy ground. "Before you go, first let me tell you a story about a special friend whose name also begins with the Letter A." The Fairy reached behind her wings and pulled out a red book. "This book is where we keep letters from our heavenly friends and the first letter is from the grandmother of Jesus and mother of the Blessed Mother. She's your heavenly grandmother and her name is St. Anne. "

Apple Blossom Fairy began to tell Michael the story of good St. Anne, who with St. Joaquin prayed for a child to raise and dedicate to God. The fairy smiled and said, "You know Michael, she is your special grandmother too and she likes to hear what's on your heart. Talk to her often." Michael looked down at the sweet flower in his hand as it shone with the fairy dust, and the joy in his heart welled up into a great smile.

"Come along, Michael," sang Mrs. Applebee, "we have many more children to meet and flowers to collect. And this bouquet will be a most wonderful gift for your mother because five of the flowers are very special." Michael looked down at his Apple Blossom and realized that the stem of the flower was pure gold. "Five of my children have golden stems and the first is the Apple Blossom. A is a very special letter, you know."

With a wink Mrs. Applebee turned and as she stepped her dainty foot onto the floor of the woods, suddenly a grassy green path appeared. "Follow me and we'll greet my other children and you'll have a gift for your mother before the end of the day." She held out her graceful hand and Michael took it, one hand holding Mrs. Applebee's and the other holding the Apple Blossom for his mother. And all the while he was wondering who they would next meet along the grassy path.