

## **Three Apples**

By Uche Peter Umez (Nigeria)

Chimezie slid into his car thinking: My boss is a jerk. Always prickly, and just as demanding as his wife, Amaechi. But then his wife was pregnant. Still, he wished it was neither her or his boss when his cell phone rang.

“Hello, dear,” he said, dreading the demand she would make.

Thank goodness, all Amaechi wanted were plain apples...to repel the funny feeling in her guts.

It wasn't funny, though, when she roused him almost every midnight to serve her some meals or snacks. He'd complained about her sudden cravings. But the fits she threw could have driven him mad. Since then, he decided he would cross the Atlantic to please her.

Chimezie drove for an hour searching for apples. The stalls didn't have; the hawkers had vanished. Apples used to be everywhere. Strange he couldn't find any.

Gnashing his teeth, he turned on his car stereo. A girl was asking the presenter about love medicine; her voice shook with sorrow.

He bypassed Methodist Junction, to evade the traffic, and came out on Egbu Road. He thought he saw a boy with a tray on his head in the rearview mirror, and slowed down. He stuck his head out the window, yelled. The boy raced towards him, gripping his tray.

“W-what are these?” Chimezie asked, frowning.

“Apples are scarce,” the boy grumbled.

Chimezie passed a hand over the yellowish-green fruits. “Why are they like this?”

The boy pressed an apple gently. “These are from South Africa. Next month, we get from France.”

Chimezie suddenly grinned. The apples reminded him of a teenager's breasts: small, hard, daring. He paid for three apples and, before the boy put them in a black nylon bag, he pointed at a tiny rust, like a pinpoint. The boy insisted the apples weren't rotting.

Chimezie started the car. His stomach twisted as he approached a roadblock. Two policemen stood on both sides of the road, faces like flint, rifles gripped tightly.

"Stop there! Move right!" the tall policeman barked, cocking his rifle.

The instant Chimezie parked, the short policeman sprang to his side.

"What is that?" he asked, eyeing the nylon bag.

"Pomegranates," Chimezie said.

"Pomade what...?" Silence. "Open the boot, oya...quick!"

Chimezie hurried out and heaved the boot open. They looked in; disappointed, they marched back to the passenger seat.

"Can I move on?" Chimezie asked, sitting back behind the wheel.

They glared at him. "The thing inside the bag, is it homemade or imported?"

"What?"

They glared at him some more, spoke in whispers for a moment before the short one grabbed the bag.

"Apples?" Surprise bloated his face.

And before Chimezie could speak the tall policeman pulled out an apple and, crunch, his teeth sank into it. Chimezie felt blood swelling his head as he watched the short policeman also thrust an apple between his teeth. He balled his fists as he imagined the hysterics his wife would display if he got home without the apples.

Suddenly, Chimezie had an idea. He cupped a hand to his mouth and began to laugh.

The policemen stared at him.

“The witch-doctor...” Chimezie said, laughing harder “...he...he injected...”

The policemen stopped munching. Their faces distended. “Y-you poisoned...?”

The apples and the nylon bag thumped on the ground. The policemen clutched their throats, spitting out the pulp, trying to retch.

Chimezie snatched the remaining apple from the bag and sped off in his car. Waltzing into the sitting room, he held the apple up, like a medal, but his wife looked at him in disbelief.

“I thought I said pineapples?” she asked, clearly disappointed.