

## Apple Girls

By Nicole Marie Zamudio-Roman

The sun beat down heavily, and everything was still. Within the stillness, the silence spoke. Every word, every consonant, every vowel, every space packed a brutal punch that left a reminder of what had occurred seasons ago. The evoked quiet was neither a comforting companion nor a treacherous enemy. Becca patted her back pocket, reassuringly. Every so often, she'd crane her neck back to catch a glimpse at the corner of the bent-up, crème-colored envelope. It made her cringe and stiffen like a deer in headlights. To escape its trance, she trotted around what had belonged *them*. The community cared little for the history. They always did. They always would. That was why they sliced *their* rustic apple tree and left the calyx.

*Today was the day.*

Her head hung down and started to count the rings the sliced tree had left behind. Some were as thick as Becca's thumb while others could have been thinner than a strand of her hair. The west wind blew a goose bump inflicting gust, making her hair prickle and fine locks come undone. *Would she still think them fine?* With her free hand, the one having its youth sucked out of it the way a mosquito sucked blood from its host, brushed the baby hairs back and hid them behind her ear. Becca's mask glowed with a childish glee while her heart choked in her rib cage. She never knew how deadly the fall would be until the impact came. How the long the bruise would stay once it had formed. *Ignorance is bliss*, the philosophers say. What they've never confessed was how to retain bliss once the forbidden fruit had been devoured.

.....  
The red sun was sinking into the horizon, as an early Autumn breeze forced the grounded leaves to be airborne and swept away. A crimson apple fell from above, hitting a series of branches before landing next to basket and some lingerie. Under a blanket, a tangle of naked limbs entwined themselves like climbing ivy vines and whispered sweet nothings with sincerity. Every touch was savory, and every lip-crushing contact rotted the innocent girl away, fleshing out the caged womanly creature within. The moon was rising, and a multitude of spheres of fire came out for a dance as the two bodies unwove themselves while smiling and laughing in a giddy manner.

Still gasping and red-faced, Becca sat up and scooted herself back to the apple tree's trunk. She wished she was at home so she could shower, but the wish quickly subsided. Embarrassment surged through her veins and the stench of sin emanated from her pores. Her parental figures would notice. Nothing went unnoticed by them.

Claire combing her fingers through her greasy-looking, dark mane, rustling leaves from its clutches. By nature, she was a lioness with the eyes of a viper. She crawled next to Becca and rested

against the trunk of the tree as well. She broke their silence with a half-hearted grin and said, “You need to exercise more Becca. You’ll be able to recover much faster.”

As skinny as Becca was, the girl’s limbs were squishy and in need of fine-tuning. There wasn’t a day that passed that she wasn’t reminded of her doe-like stick figure only tender limbed. Average does weren’t without their share of bodily flaws. Hunters knew the way does looked and the speed in which they frolicked didn’t impact their poise and grace. Becca rolled her eyes yet shiver under the watchful eyes of her predator. Claire had legs like no other. She was a runner.

Becca quirked a toothy smile and rested her head on Claire’s shoulder, “I don’t care. I’m simply a sculptress.”

She allowed her fingers to trail their way down the other girl’s body and into one of Claire’s open palm. They gripped each other as if an invisible force were trying to strip them apart. There was only the cool autumn breeze. It was a mutual ally but would become more of a bother—once the breeze became the wind. When the breeze became the wind, the girls would have to outrun it or pay the price with shivering goose bumps and itchy, red mosquito bites. At this thought, Claire slid Becca’s hand free. Only after the fact did it occur to her that she’d been staring at it.

Wrapping her pale sweaty arms around Claire’s neck. Like two peas in a pod, Becca sat in Claire’s bare lap. The tsunami of shame that always appeared after an earthquake rippled through her being. She hid her face in Claire’s breasts, like a self-conscious child does with their mother. *Ba Boom Ba Boom Ba Boom*. A heart raced. It wasn’t clear whom the fast beating pulse belonged to and it didn’t matter. Delectably raw emotions were the fuel for passionate adrenaline. No one could steal that away. Claire pawed at Becca’s hair with as much tenderness as a child handling a new toy.

Peering out at the night sky, Claire said, “The stars are so lovely tonight. You should look at them.”

“In. A minute.”

After the tremors faded, Becca looked past the tree’s branches. The twinkling stars glistened like exceptional, privileged jewels dangling up above. Claire kept her eyes on the stars and her arms wrapped around on Becca’s body. She gave her the body she wore like clothing a light squeeze every so often. Was it a reminder that it was, in fact, a body with breast touching breast? Bellybutton kissing bellybutton. She was shielding their nudity from view. Nudity was never not unnerving. It wasn’t the tricks of temptation from the traditionally unpoped cherries that forged the train wreck. Claire knew it was the blissful figments of women—of Becca—that blindfolded, carved invisible maddening marks into her skin.

The sky was preciously crystal clear, and the view was priceless. Claire gulped audibly in the deafening silence. Picking up a newly fallen apple, she reached over to the side for a water bottle and

cleaned the fruit. The crunch from the scarlet fruit was fresh and the sticky juice that flowed out was even more so.

Licking her lips, Claire said, "I have a confession to make Rebecca,"

Becca cocked her head to the side and back. Claire did not meet her gaze. Becca said, "Alright, shoot."

"I'm moving...to a new house."

The words penetrated Becca faster than a hunter's tranquilizing darts ever could. Stiff and stuck is what she was. She said, "That's great? I'm sure I could—"

"In Honduras."

A tidal wave drowned out any words the girls had planned to say to each other. *Crunch*. The juice of the ripe apple continued to flow out.

"Honduras?"

"It's my Papi's job. He was relocated so we're moving."

"But, can't *you* stay? You're seventeen. That means you're one year from legally being an adult. I'm sure—"

When Claire's attempt at a Hispanic accent came out, Becca hugged the other girl's body. Fake accents could never sing the right kind of song. Claire said, "No. Rebecca, listen, this—us—has been great. You've always been a great friend to me, Rebecca, and all I want is to remember you as being one of my greatest friends."

"So, you're leaving me for Honduras?"

"To be fair, we were never formally together." Said aloud, the line wounded both girls. "We were just silly apple girls with tongues stuck in cored fruit."

The hunter had killed its prey. Becca got up and crawled to her clothing, hiding her face with her hair. Seeds of water strode down her cheeks, "When do you leave?"

"The day after tomorrow but today is the day for final goodbyes."

"Why?" then she whispered, "At the core, we're red with flaming, passionate desire and coated in sweet, juicy intimacies for one another."

Claire tied her hair into a messy bun and redressed herself in too-fitted booty shorts and bralette. She cored the apple and held it out to Becca. Crickets and frogs chimed to their choir. Claire's fingers were sticky now. The first winged annoyance arrived at her finger tip.

"Don't be stubborn Becca. We need to enjoy the time we have and relish the past."

At that, Becca studied the half-bitten fruit. No longer was there a stem to grab it by. Using her thumb and forefinger, she took nibble from the unbitten side.

Claire's viper gaze sent chills down Becca's spine. She watched her nibble. She watched her devour. The cowardly, cat-like woman spat, "What is our love if not a lustful, sugar-coated mirage? What would people think if they knew we ate apples?" Claire paused for a moment then continued, "I'm sorry. I need time to think. Honduras will make me think. Plus, the Honduran landscape is great practice for extreme long-distance runs."

"Before you go, answer me this: What's the difference between an apple, a cherry, a fig, an orange, a pear, a melon, a peach and a banana?"

"I refuse to let myself be tossed and mixed into a fruit salad. There is more to life than a fruity salad or worse--fruitcake."

The whole world was bleak for the listening soldier and the self-deluding liar. After everything was picked up, both girls looked at the engraving they'd made on the tree's trunk long ago.

C + B = Apple Girls

They invented the language of the fruits. It flowed out like the juice seeping through the cored fruit. Apples were for girls. The other fruits were for men.

.....  
Becca's prance around the stump came to a halt as she caught sight of a figure in the distance.

It was *her*. The physique was *hers* at least. As a definite woman, Claire still prowled and held her nose high in the air. The tight clothes *she* wore knew her body almost intimately. They had once come to learn each other's curves like elastic clothes. The Great Flood of Memories of what had existed resurfaced. Daunting as it was, a doe was never truly alone.

Before Becca's fantasies started their foxtrot, she took note of the thumb-sucking cub clinging to Claire's arm. The little beast was being dragged by its mother. As it got closer, the creature showed its smile. The little fangs weren't inherited from a lioness. No, they looked like the fangs of a bat. The child had a sort of rodent, monstrous look to him that wasn't inherited from his mother. *Poor thing*. It was still the lioness's cub.

Their gaze met for a solitary moment until the howling wind rose specks of dirt into the air. Claire sealed her eyelids and stopped for a moment, then kept walking with her eyes closed. It didn't dawn on her until she and her cub reached the sliced paradise that she was a lioness still but belonged to a pride. What was her pride?

"You got my invitation, I presume?" Claire started.

Becca was quiet. She stared down at the kit. It rubbed its eyes and whined. Claire picked him up and cradled the small body against her chest.

"You presumed correctly." Becca studied the small boy again and said, "From the looks of it and from your letters, Honduras has been quite the adventure. No?"

"It wasn't what I was expecting."

“And what were you expecting exactly?”

With a deep sigh Claire said, “Becca, once you’ve eaten of the tree of knowledge, there is no going back. You don’t know this until the world becomes a vicious enemy and does what it can to make you suffer for your wrongdoings.”

“We’re apple girls.”

“Apples!” Claire looked down at her child at the same time as Becca. He was bashfully hiding in melons. and smiling. She set him down on the stump.

Claire hugged him, “Yep, but it seems that there aren’t any more apples; however, more than one type of fruit grows on trees. What do you think Becca? Shouldn’t we grow more than just apples?”

“I think, I like apples best.” One thing she’d never confess is that she liked her fruits frozen. They burned when they slithered down your throat. Nutritionists will say it’s a healthy deception almost like the serpent in the garden. She never seen frozen apples though. Maybe they couldn’t be frozen or preserved for an extensive period of time.

A smile split out from Claire like never before. How did they become apple girls? Only they knew. Every pear of fruit girls have their own story. These apple girls descended from nothing more than electrifying nightly outings, teenage needs to rebel that included fruit punch and sangria, fruit-covered lingo and mixed feelings towards the Catholic Church’s wine.

.....  
*What’s to come:*

*I want to continue to write this story going back and forth between past and present. My next scene will be set in the past and I want it to be a ‘how they met and hooked up’ scene. The next future scene I’d want it to be an introduction to what’s happened in Honduras since Claire’s been away and what’s been going on in their lives in those gap years. In the end I want to reveal that that invitation is actually an invitation to Claire’s wedding.*