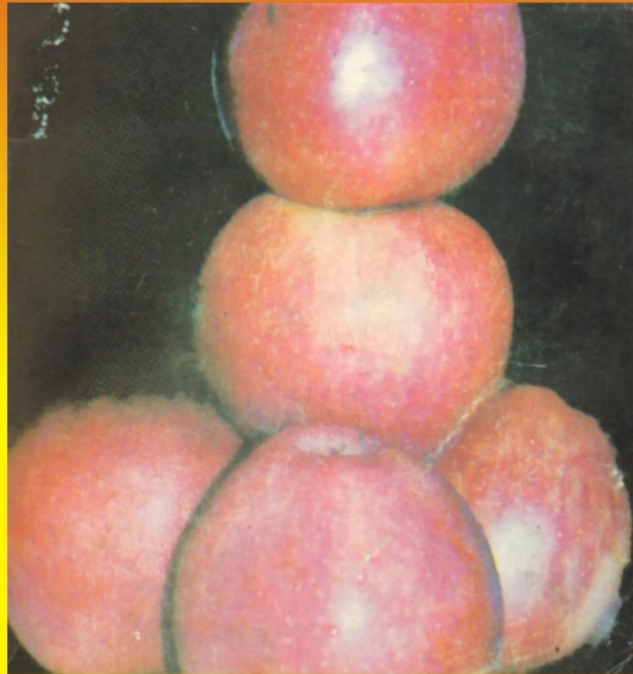


Abubakar Gimba

Sacred Apples



...I Know you have eaten your fill- for now.
Someday you may be hungry again. And you'll
go to the garden...

-Never again, grandma! Never...!

Sacred Apple is the story of ones woman's
search for the identity in a modern world.
Should she live as a 'woman of the times'-
independent, free? Would she find fulfilment
in marriage? She would search... The answer,
both radical and reactionary, had always been
there but would her search lead her to it?

Abubakar Gimbar has written a thoughtful
story that gives a richer understanding of
women and marriage in today's world of con-
flicting expectations and demands.



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Sacred Apples

by

Abubakar Gimba

Dedication

For
my mother
and the womenkind that
she represents.....
womenkind
who know the pains
and joy of motherhood
and wifehood,
as well as
those who
appreciate and
respect their
womanhood..

ONE

She sat on the floor, her legs stretched, beside her bed. A myriad of thoughts crowded her mind. Engulfed by the quietude of the night, she appeared oblivious of her surroundings. But inside her was a growing turbulence of anxiety. Alternating currents of fear and hope combined to heighten the wave of despair that followed the non-appearance of her granddaughter at the scheduled time.

Then suddenly she was startled by the cry of a nightbird. A hooting owl perched on the mango tree at the back of her house, for the first time, frightened her. Why this night? For many months now, this owl had been such a consistent nightly visitor, virtually turning the mango tree into its nocturnal abode, such that no night was complete without its hooting. The bird, she seemed to have accepted, was part of the house. But tonight? She wrestled with a creeping superstitious thought the owl is a bird of ill omen. And there seemed to be a distinctive ring to the bird's cry tonight: a frightening loudness as if it was right atop the roof of her room. Why?

Will her granddaughter still arrive that night at all? Her stomach growled as her fears and anxiety heightened. She took in a deep breath, and slowly began to stand up. Slightly stooped, she took a few quick steps towards the light switch. She put on the light, and her finger still on the switch, she looked at her table clock.

My God she took in a deep breath again and sighed.
It was twenty-six minutes after midnight!

Again the owl hooted.

And still her granddaughter was not in sight! After over six hours of waiting ... and this owl ... Hopelessness descended on her like a ravenous eagle on its prey. She had now to reach the conclusion she had loathed to even contemplate: something had gone wrong with her granddaughter. And almost trembling, she moved her frail figure towards the prayer corner in the room ...

The owl hooted yet again

And again

And again

Something, she told herself, has definitely gone wrong. With tears in her eyes, she immediately went down on her knees and raised up both hands in supplication.

She remained on her knees for about thirty minutes, then sat down. Her hands were still raised in supplication. She was however, now more relaxed; the prayer seemed to have calmed her. Once again, a stream of thoughts began to intrude on her. And in vain, she tried to wrestle her worst fears out of her mind. Thus she suffered her concentration; her mind vacillated between prayers and the whereabouts of the gem of her blood. She would strain her ears just to pick the slightest of movement or sound that perchance could herald the arrival, albeit very late, of her loved one. The distant humming sound of vehicles more than any other sound often heightened her anxiety and hope. But each time, she was left to feel like a dreamer, with each hope fading into distant oblivion, just like the vehicle sound that engendered

it in the first place.

Will my gem ever surface?

Are you in doubt as to the efficacy of prayers?

No, no, no.... just that.... there is an owl on my roof....!

Not on your roof, but in the mango tree.... and it's always been there.

Yeah.... just that today it hoots with such a terrifying reverberation.... quite inexplicable, a little mysterious....

The owl hooted yet again and Zubaydah recoiled in fright, immediately, putting an end to her inner debate. She readjusted herself to her kneeling position with renewed dedication, and turned her mind completely to prayers once more.

As she became absorbed in prayers, calmness began to return to her agitated mind. And once again, some thoughts began to creep into her concentration. She thought of telephoning the police station or the hospital, even though she recoiled at the thought that her granddaughter could have been involved in an accident. And as quickly, she tried to banish the thought. An ominous thought... again, she remembered the owl.

It however, soon dawned on her that trying to telephone any place at all would have been a futile exercise. Her line had been put out of service by the telephone company for over two months now. She had failed to pay her bill: she had actually refused to pay. The bill, she contested, was outrageous. An extortion. It amounted to about ten times her usual monthly bill. And as there was no change in the frequency of her calls, she saw no justification in the sudden leap in the bill. The company did concede that, by the law of averages,

the old lady was right. But so also, they believed, was their computer. And this was what infuriated Zubaydah. She was not only hurt by the implied insult that she was a liar, but bemoaned the times that man could, against all reason and evidence, take a stand against a member of his own species, in support of a machine. Her granddaughter had teasingly reminded her that she was a product of an age that was now a backyard to the space age they were in. And the maxim of the prevailing times was, when in doubt trust the machine! An absurdity, lamented the grandmother; that the creation has been bestowed more relevance, and even reverence than the creator. She thanked God for her advanced age, that she would not witness much of the oddity. And with a rare firm insistence, she told her granddaughter that the bill must not be settled, despite the latter's entreaties that she be allowed to do so.

Now, however, as she knelt in supplication, she wished for once that the bill was paid. For the first time, she regretted her adamancy over the non-payment. Now, she could agree to the payment of any amount as long as it would enable her to make calls to inquire about her granddaughter.

Call the hospital, the police station, friends, even her gem's house in New Tymbuktu ... and the owl cried yet again!

Zubaydah quickly returned to earnest supplication.

It was now almost two-thirty in the morning. The old lady was now very tired. She began to doze, though fighting hard to stay awake. She had however, resigned herself to not seeing her granddaughter this night anymore, till the following morning. She, none the less, never relented in her prayers