

# Apples and Potatoes

## A Subject

Once upon a time, there was a great country, a great city with a long street, and a great house with a great, long cellar—yes, there was that, too.

Down there, in the half-darkness of the basement, two worlds lived peacefully side by side:

On one side rested the shiny, round apples. Each one sat proudly upon its own elegant sheet of fine white patisserie paper. On the other side sat the potatoes. Wrinkled, brown, and covered with soil, they cozied together in a rough wooden crate that stood damp and dark in the rear corner of the cellar.

These two utterly different tribes were ruled by an arrogant, pretentious Apple King and an uncouth, gruff Potato Baron. Neither of them yielded an inch when it came to defending their own four wooden boards. Both were constantly on guard to avoid any encounter with the other. The foreign, and thus the Other, was considered far too dangerous. Any closeness—let alone speaking a word with each other—was unthinkable. Isolation was therefore an unwritten law, a taboo which neither people dared nor wished to break.

But precisely that which was never to happen began to unfold. One early morning, a dreadful stench filled the air—heavy, acrid, rotten. A haze like a dark veil spread over the apple crate. Alarmed, the apples peeled open their skins in shock, cast baffled glances around, and sniffed—yet the source of the evil remained hidden.

Where could this disgusting smell be coming from? Nothing could be seen! At once the often haughty Apple King was informed of the dilemma. He surveyed the situation, scrutinizing his subjects with stern suspicion. A thought began to form in his mind. Was it possible that one of his apples had... made contact with a potato? For potatoes emit an invisible gas that causes apples to rot more quickly. Or was some mysterious sickness brewing inside one of the apples itself, poisoning the air?

And so they stood there, the apples, in sheer perplexity, while the stench lingered over their shelf like a bad omen.

It did not take long before the culprit was found. From the very back of the crate came a faint, pitiful whimper that foretold nothing good. An

apple had been struck by rot—badly so. Its shine had faded, its skin marred by dark, shadowy streaks. With it had come the foul smell now threatening the entire realm.

Shocked and curious, many apples rolled closer to the unfortunate one. Some tried to comfort him, while others shrank back to the safer edges of the crate—suspicious, fearful, trapped in dread of contagion from the strange mold. For they knew: even the briefest touch of a rotting apple could ruin the whole store.

Thus the apple folk faced a decision: closeness or safety? Compassion or caution? For the foreign was no longer out there among the potatoes—suddenly it lived right in their midst.

The Apple Doctor was summoned. He examined the patient carefully, sniffed the fumes, gently tapped at the soft spots, and finally drew a tiny sample of juice for analysis. Within moments, the verdict was clear: the disease was incurable.

The rot had burrowed too deep into the flesh; there was no way back. And no apple brandy was at hand to at least slow the decay. The doctor could not even peel the fruit to remove the dark, mushy tissue—it lay too deep. One of their own was lost.

The Apple King was troubled. Deeply unsettled, he turned his thoughts like heavy seeds inside his royal core. What should he do? Leaving the diseased apple in the crate was not only risky because of contagion—it was also dangerous because the odours it emitted were invitations: sweet, tempting signals to insects, flies, moths, larvae—all the ravenous little creatures for whom a rotting apple meant a feast. Unthinkable! A shiver ran through his royal peel.

And there were more dangers from beyond. For under the motto “I’ll always eat an apple,” the Mistress of the house, ruler of kitchen and cellar, especially cherished this fruit above all. Frequently, on weekends, she descended the cellar stairs and with knowing eye chose the most beautiful apples—those with flawless skin, plump flesh, and sweet fragrance—for cakes, compotes, Sunday bread, juice, and schnapps.

But now the far greater danger was that, confronted with such a vile stench, the housewife might grab the entire crate and throw it onto the rubbish heap—believing them all spoiled like one foul, worthless heap.

The noble apple nation would then face a miserable, pointless end. This must not happen, feared the King! That was not his intent! As ruler, crowned with the shine of his peel and borne by the trust of his people, it

was his highest duty to protect his kin. Besides, his very position was at stake: should he fail, he would lose the crown. And if the rot spread, no loyal apple subjects would remain at all—no faithful horde to honour him, no cluster to follow him.

There remained only one solution.

The sick apple must be cast out—banished from the centre, from the warmth of the crate, from the protection of the community.

And so, stubbornly and with pompous authority, the Apple Monarch announced his decree to the wooden ranks. But he was gravely mistaken!

Not all apples could accept their king's command.

A quiet resistance began to form—first as whispers, then as murmurs, finally rising to a clear, rumbling protest.

Could it truly be right that in times of trouble the apple folk should abandon the weakest, failing to help him? To look away—or even to expel one in need—would stain their very honour. What good was it, after all, that each might lounge luxuriously on his patisserie paper? At the first difficulty, should one then be thrown out into the dark, filthy cellar? This fate could strike any of them! The rotting apple might even roll to the potatoes, who might well be resistant to such stench. Imagine the catastrophe if angered potatoes came seeking out the apple crate! Who could fathom what would happen then? Peaceful coexistence would collapse—disastrous and unimaginable.

Meanwhile, the sick apple, moaning and groaning, rolled up to the King himself and revealed his shrivelled peel and wounds—his once-red skin now mottled with dull brown and dark decay. He had become more than a sick fruit. He had become, in every sense, a *bone of contention*: not only rotten, but a symbol of bitter disputes, a seed of division, a moral test for the entire apple people.

What no one knew, and what the contentious apple himself did not dare confess—neither to the King nor to the agitated crowd—was his dark secret. He had secretly left the crate. Not from defiance, not from rebellion, but purely from curiosity. He had wanted to see with his own eyes how the potatoes lived. Were they really as crude, dark, and dangerous as the old apple tales claimed? Or were those merely legends, stoking unfounded fears?

The potatoes were indeed not as neat and appetizing. But they were certainly no monsters.

The relentless Apple King explained the rotten apple's situation to him, expressed pity, reminded him of his duty to others, offered encouragement, and urged him to leave the crate at once.

The apple remained silent. Slowly he turned away, rolling heavily toward the edge of the box. The delicate patisserie paper, once the emblem of his dignity, he left behind.

Thus the bone of contention departed his familiar home and set off into the deep, dark cellar—into the unknown.