

## Macabre Souvenir

The supermarket is a segregated island, located between the slums and their raw opposing realities. The ripe papaya gives me the sensation that it is made of gold and will never rot — extraordinary brilliance of color. The manager passes by me, and her piercing gaze is not enough to stop me from thinking it out loud: she despises me. Doesn't recognize that I am also part of this breakless nation. Master of the invisible and beyond, she represents the Cartesian allure of this messy country.

Ripe papaya in hand, I feel a sinister presence. Not just the manager. A sort of schism of ancestral souls. I push away an uncontrollable urge to flee. The organized manager, lover of automatic tills that will one day replace her, blocks my way. Irritated, but afraid of sounding reckless, I stop, fearing she will think I am the sinister presence. I can't explain myself anyway, not in the presence of so many senzalas.

I walk past the fruit stand and am about to reach the street when someone knocks me down. What is going on? I see people running to help a sea of beings sprawled on the ground.

“My phone!” the girl yells. What's worse (or, rather, better, her mother will affirm later) is that the device has been destroyed, but not before shielding her from a stray bullet. Incredible business. Wrong place, phone in hand at the right time. No other explanation.

“We feel a bit lost, don't we?” The girl says to me, sounding like an adult. But soon she is distracted by her mother, who finds her and covers her in kisses.

On my way home, my rigid muscles reveal trauma, both fear and relief in each step. Legs shaking so much that I need to sit down on the pavement and wait until the dizziness stops. I think about the girl. Her braids and her broken phone.

The bullet, the one that zipped past and almost hit me, I find later in my pocket. Impossible that it could have landed there, but there it is. I conclude I must have sleepwalked away with it between my sweaty fingers, along with the papaya. I keep it. It will remind me of my near death experience, my belonging.

When I was little, I had the habit of wrapping fruits in the newspaper, using a fork to make tiny holes to help them ripen faster. How did I end up here? I am tired. I am sad. On the sidewalk, accompanied by the beautiful papaya, I want to cry, want to walk away with something other than this copper creature of a no man's land, this macabre souvenir.