

Jenny Ferguson

Guatemala III

Road block. The rumour circulating from truck to bus to motorcyclist insists on scheduled maintenance, a governmental delay. Sit still. Unaware until they creep up into the melee, black smoke and motorists take over the oncoming lane. They squeeze into gaps in the road, over lines painted in white to reach the front of the line. It's a game of hurry up and wait. And we're waiting.

We were caught unaware, but the Maya were not. They mill about with baskets on their heads, filled with lukewarm pop and water and fresh-picked apples. They open the rear door of the buses uninvited, climb in and weave through. And reach into open windows, climb onto fenders, pry open the doors of our old sixteen-seater bus to try to sell us hand-woven bracelets laced through a basket of beer cans. "I can cut a deal, lady."

Around the mountain corner, in the on-coming lane, the fearless chicken buses roar to life. Their horns warn drivers to clear the way, but the buses do not slow down as they approach our temporary market. The Maya disembark and scatter to the unpaved shoulders. A young boy tries to make a last sale, almost loses his toes in the process. Motorized vehicles fight like children crawling on top of themselves for free ice cream, all elbows and bumpers to the front of the line.

As we enjoy our beers, our tart apples, we chug uphill, rounding the corner. No evidence of construction, only a handful of Mayan women in purple, red, and orange woven gowns, standing next to a rickety stall stacked high with fruit.

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Guatemala IV

He's a collector. Finding people where others don't bother to look. Then he collects them. In airport waiting rooms, in fields where the corn has been raised from the ground and the first time, his childhood treehouse, the one he claimed from a neighbour and kept for his own.

In Guatemala, he found three young Maya. Girls, probably no older than twelve, with baskets of handmade goods to sell to the tourists balanced on their heads.

In English they say: Mister, what do you want to buy from me? This scarf? (holding up the scarf for inspection) Amber? Jade? This is Mayan jade, quality necklace, Mister. (the scarf gone now, a gaudy jade necklace in her outstretched hand) When he pulls out a handful of quetzales, buys something from the talkative girl, she pockets the money, delivers the goods (jade earrings for a girl he'd collected and set on his shelf to collect dust back home) and then asks without shame: What now will you buy from my friends?

He spends like the crumpled, colourful bills could buy hotels on the boardwalk and tucks these girls into his empty billfold for when he'll need them later.

Jenny Ferguson is a Canadian studying for her PhD at the University of South Dakota. She writes in her log home surrounded by foster dogs and corn fields. Her recent writing can be found at *The Citron Review*, *Work Literary Magazine*, *NANO Fiction*, *Thrice Fiction*, and on cards from Architrave Press.