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Mango Sellers

Sierra Leone 1991

By Helen Fallon

I meet the mango sellers at the crossroads,
heading for the Freetown market, babies tied
to strong backs with wraps of cloth, enamel bowls
on their heads, piled high with fresh mangoes,
scarlet chillies and silky purple aubergines.
Their laughter is mango yellow, with hints
of red and orange. I join them on their journey,
pink dust rises in swirls from flip-flopped feet.

Sometimes I think about those mango sellers,
when they couldn't sell their goods,
because it wasn't safe to go to town, as civil war
cut through lives, like mango flesh sliced by a machete.
Back home, in Tesco, I hold a mango to my cheek,
hoping to evoke pink dust and women's laughter,
in the swirling red and orange. But the mangoes
sold here are green, and bear the label *Ripen at home*.

