

Rita Mookerjee

Shrine

In the market, Rayanne arranges
breadfruit and guava on her stand.
She frames them with squat pumpkins
and green hooks of plantain. She
leans against her stool to stretch her
legs, finished with curation. She ties
up her braids and calls over to Cecile
selling vegetables two stands over.

Like many market women, Rayanne
says hands off the goods, but she makes
exceptions to this rule for the college
kids, the ones far from their homes in
Saint Lucia and Barbados. Rayanne
learns their names, asks about their studies.
She brings them over to touch the squash
and the June plums. In return, they tell her
the fruit words they use back home:
christophine, pomme-settiere. She laughs.

All of this happens far downtown,
around the corner from stray dogs with
short coats and long tongues. All of this
happens near the labyrinth of old crates
built by ghosts and drifters who are dead
asleep on the pavement. But this is

all that is left in the frame of a NatGeo
photo for an article about black poverty,
crime, death. Probably. Let them say death,
danger, dirt, rot. The longer they think this,
the longer Rayanne can protect her fresh
fruits and the sacred land that bears them.
