

CALLADITAS SE VEN MÁS BONITAS

Nicole Zamudio-Roman fiction

The most ruthless encounters for girls occurred in the schoolyard or in a convenience store. It didn't hit me until after I flipped the switch on adolescence, but seeing Carmen Santiago walk into the convenience store wearing pumps and a fastened coat, and clutching a designer bag in hand made me just a bit salty. As the doors slid closed behind her, thunder boomed, and the downpour of rain continued. Carmen was solo today; it was a rarity for her kind. With her mini stilts, she walked with an irregular grace around the cardboard-covered linoleum to the soda aisle in the back. Thankfully, she didn't look like the hen of seventh grade anymore, trying to accentuate things she didn't have enough of yet by sticking out her chest and backside. She's a much more natural-looking chicken. A smile popped onto my face and just as quickly disappeared as I remembered this was Carmen Santiago, the girl whose crew used to call me a loudmouth chatterbox and made fun of my non-accented perfect Spanish.

"Calladitas se ven más bonitas,"

my mother used to say. Silence makes girls look prettier. Maybe, that's why I haven't been able to hold down a relationship for more than two and a half weeks. My mother blamed me for not following rule number one. For not looking pretty in silence. For not growing up as a natural mini-Latina like Carmen Santiago.

Carmen wandered into the candy aisle, parallel the cash register with a Coca-Cola in hand. When had she grabbed a Coca-Cola? What a Latinx thing to buy. Her soaked thick, dark, lioness-like mane dripped, wetting the floors where she went. The wet hair covered a large portion of her face. She stared down at the ground as if she were inspecting the cleanliness of the floors. The thought of having to mop up the trail later prickled my skin.

"Can I help you?" I asked in a stupidly small voice. \$8.50 an hour was too little to put up with Carmen Santiago and anything she must be plotting.

She stiffened, turning in a ninety-degree angle as if to leave, then retreated from the idea. She grabbed the first bag of candy in

her direction and walked to the counter. Sliding the candy and a Coca-Cola onto the counter, in her hoarse voice, she said, “Èsto y un ticket de lotto.”

“\$4.03.” And I rang up her randomized Lotto numbers.

She put her handbag to the left side of the counter, pulling out her wallet and looked up. Her eyeshadow was an outline of the Mississippi River smeared on her puffed cheeks. One cheek was a shade of violet red that will surely be black by tomorrow morning. Like an earthquake, she trembled, all while fighting back a flood of tears.

“Should I call el nuevo once?” I offered her the Lotto ticket and her receipt.

She quirked a small smile, pulling herself together. Taking both the ticket and receipt, she placed them in her bag, “*Calladitas se ven más bonitas*. Didn’t your mother ever teach you that?”