

Selections from *Fatal Error*
(2021) by Michel de Oliveira

Translated by Sam McCracken

Translator's Preface

Michel de Oliveira (1988–) is a writer, photographer, visual artist, cultural critic, and professor of Social Communication at the Universidade Federal de Sergipe. The fiction to follow first appeared in de Oliveira's *Fatal Error* (Editora Moinhos, 2021), a collection of decidedly post-digital short stories that share—among other things—a sustained preoccupation with the nature of contemporary life in the age of the network and mobile communication technologies. In *Fatal Error*, that is to say, Oliveira presents his reader with a world marked at every turn by smartphones, search engines, and screens, as well as drones, ride-sharing, and even an imagined cyborgean prosthetic or two. Though Oliveira's work in *Fatal Error* drips with the digital, it is likewise steeped in questions of human desire, embodiment, and the realm of the sensuous, often situated along many of the (quite literal) interfaces between the two.

Born in Tobias Barreto, Sergipe—the smallest of Brazil's 26 states—Oliveira has long been interested in the promises and problems of digital mediation, both academically and in his creative practice. His undergraduate degree in journalism at the Universidade Federal de Sergipe culminated in the development of *Revista Crivo*, a digital magazine of art, criticism, and culture that took advantage of the interactive affordances of digital media and combined text with image, audio, and sound, all of which were accessible “without needing to be connected to the internet.”¹ As he began graduate study, Oliveira adjusted his lens: The writer-cum-photographer turned his focus more squarely toward photography, seeking to expand Brazilian theoretical conceptions of the medium, which were, by his account, largely limited to the critical perspectives available in those precious few works of Western philosophy dedicated to the form that had been translated into Portuguese: namely, Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* and Susan Sontag's *On Photography*.²

¹ “Revista Crivo será lançada nesta sexta,” *Infonet*, December 16, 2010, <https://infonet.com.br/noticias/cultura/revista-crivo-sera-lancada-nesta-sexta/>.

² Paulo César Boni, “Prefácio,” in *Saudades eternas: fotografia entre a morte e a sobrevida*, by Michel de Oliveira (Eduel, 2018), 1.

Oliveira's master's thesis, completed at the Universidade Estadual de Londrina, and doctoral dissertation, undertaken at the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, would result, respectively, in two book-length studies of photography. The former, *Saudades eternas: fotografia entre a morte e a sobrevivida* (Eternal longing: Photography between death and survival, EdueL, 2018), thinks through the questions of grief and remembrance by foregrounding a certain tension between the physical permanence of the photographic record and the embodied, felt heartache harbored by those with memories of the photographically captured but no longer present. The latter, *Seduzidos pela luz: ou bases antropológicas da fotografia* (Seduced by the light: Or, the anthropological bases of photography, Imaginalis, 2021), by contrast, argues against the notion of "post-photography"—a critical buzzword born out of the digital turn—and advocates instead for "hyperphotography," drawing upon the writer's training in (social) communication and information studies in order to historicize the nature and form of contemporary photography within view of its antecedents.

Running parallel to his intellectual formation, Oliveira has maintained a steady creative output over the past decade, both as a photographer and as a writer. To date, he has written four book-length creative works in addition to *Fatal Error*, all of which vary in genre and central preoccupation but are nevertheless colored by Oliveira's wit, wordplay, and recurrent interest in gender, sexuality, the body, and the digital. His debut, *Cólicas, câimbras & outras dores* (Colics, cramps, and other pains, Oito e Meio, 2017), assembles 58 stories, each of which is structured around a given physical or mental illness. In his follow-up, *O sagrado coração do homem* (The sacred heart of man, Moinhos, 2018), Oliveira retells—in the form of poems, flash-fiction, and short stories—iconic scenes from the Bible, recasting them with science-fictional flair and with choice nods to our contemporary mediascape. In his version of the temptation of woman, for example, the "woman" in question ultimately proves to be the direction-giving, feminine voice of a car's GPS system.

In his first volume of poetry, *O amor são tontas coisas* (Love are stupid things, Moinhos, 2021)—a grammatically broken title that plays on the slippage between *tonta* (stupid) and *tanta*

(many)—Oliveira presents a collection of poems that, on their surface, appear as timeless as any other series of love poems. Directed toward a nameless, apostrophic you, Oliveira’s erotic verses trace the contours of love won and love lost, but also to the contents of lost “pendrives”³ or to the pain of an unanswered phone call,⁴ reminding the reader that before us is a poetic account of a distinctly modern type of love. Oliveira’s most recent book—the author’s first novel—*Meus dedos sentem falta do seu cheiro* (My fingers miss your smell, Moinhos, 2024), follows in a similar vein in its depiction of a young man’s coming out and subsequent attempt to navigate same-sex desire in the era of hookup apps, a tension which also surfaces in several of *Fatal Error*’s stories. “I could have been contemporary and gone hunting on the smartphone apps,” remarks the speaker of *Meus dedos* at one moment, “but the logic of the display case disquieted me, bodies in pieces, with chests and biceps for sale.”⁵

* * *

The *Fatal Error* stories I have selected are rife with apps and influencers, streaming platforms and delivery services, romances, and falling-outs. But make no mistake, in Oliveira’s hands, things tend to skew more *Black Mirror* than *Her*.⁶ Consistent with the traditions of science and speculative fiction from which it follows, *Fatal Error* meets the digital with a healthy dose of tongue-in-cheek skepticism, at times commenting directly on existing technologies, apps, or platforms and other times imagining what might develop from them in the not-so-distant future. Whether they may prove horrifying or utterly banal, both the technologies and ends toward which they are put in *Fatal Error* lie wedged between the foreground and background of Oliveira’s fiction. These technologies are at once inextricable from the stories yet ultimately secondary to the inquiry into contemporary social life the author advances through them. *What*

³ Michel de Oliveria, *O amor são tontas coisas* (Editora Moinhos, 2021), 65.

⁴ Oliveria, *O amor*, 49.

⁵ Michel de Oliveria, *Meus dedos sentem falta do seu cheiro* (Moinhos, 2024), 32.

⁶ *Black Mirror*, created by Charlie Brooker (2011–), on Channel 4 and Netflix; and *Her*, directed by Spike Jonze (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2013).

new pressures does social-mediation place on romantic connection? What relationships do we consent to when we accept an app's terms and conditions? Who are we without Google?

Furnishing, as fiction does best, a variety of elliptical, imaginative answers to the above, *Fatal Error* confronts the ever-extending shadow of the digital in our cultural moment, but it does so, too, without descending into universals or utopias. Oliveira's fiction, as rich as it may be with remediated, all-too-common screen interfaces, also places its reader firmly in the Brazilian context, giving credence in its hybridity to Scott Weintraub's claim that "the non-place of Latin American digital or technopoetics evinces a positionality that departs *from* a specific cultural, linguistic, and geographic cartography that is marked and transected by 'the Latin American' in a particular manner."⁷ In short, in a world where people from the United States can ask with total sincerity if "there's Wi-Fi in Brazil"—the nation that boasts the ninth largest economy on the planet—Oliveira's fiction would seem to reply, "Yes, too much of it, in fact."

DO YOU WISH TO CONTINUE?

Y / N

⁷ Scott Weintraub, "Situating the Digital in Latin American Technopoetics," *Latin American Digital Poetics*, ed. Scott Weintraub and Luis Correa-Díaz (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 9.

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Unfollow

@marvinho liked three of @enzoo's photos; @enzoo responded with a "Like" on the most recent picture @marvinho posted to his feed, a pretty conceptual shot of, like, paint flaking off a wall. @marvinho liked five more of @enzoo's photos, including one posted four weeks earlier of him shirtless on the beach after flexing and doing some crunches to make his muscles pop. @enzoo started following @marvinho, who followed back days later in order to feign casual disinterest despite having already liked old pictures.

They continued liking recent pictures and viewing each other's stories until @marvinho had the initiative to send the first message—in reality a reply to a story @enzoo posted at a water park, holding his breath to minimize his gut in the photo. Handsomeeee, @marvinho wrote. @enzoo responded with a heart. The conversation ended at that.

They only spoke again days later when @marvinho went to the mall and posted a selfie to his story, something he—always with abstract photos, unusual angles, and conceptual themes—didn't often do.

Flawlesssssss

:)

I'm embarrassed

Embarrassed by what?

Omg, it's just that you're so hot

I totally admire you

Your stories and selfies are really motivating

The reply couldn't have been more perfect to conquer @enzoo, who on that night sent @marvinho a picture of himself in just his underwear, adjusting his bulge before clicking so that it would be

positioned in a strategic way. @marvinho reciprocated with a photo in his boxers, out of focus and dark, but @enzoo lied:

Hotttttttttt

On Saturday, they decided to meet up in the mall food court in front of McDonald's. @marvinho arrived first: jean shorts, marine blue T-shirt, sneakers with Shox, and white socks. @enzoo appeared 17 minutes later: khaki shorts, boat shoes, no socks, short-sleeved shirt with a llama print. When they hugged, @enzoo's imported perfume penetrated @marvinho's shirt.

They ate lunch at the Japanese restaurant. The daily combo: temaki + six sushis + six salmon sashimis. They cracked up while they ate, @enzoo didn't know how to use chopsticks, @marvinho tried to teach him, but @enzoo always dropped his sushi in the shoyu dish, splashing dark droplets across the beige formica table. In the end, @enzoo managed to eat the last two pieces without dropping them. A round of applause from @marvinho.

Dessert was a milkshake from Bob's. They sat in front of the mall's interior garden, close together. And they drew closer and closer with straws in their mouths, @enzoo's perfume growing stronger. So close that the outcome was inevitable: @enzoo pulled his iPhone from his pocket and took a selfie with @marvinho. Their heads joined, perfume, straws, caption: cool saturday with @marvinho.

After that, the kiss. @enzoo, chocolate-flavored; @marvinho, vanilla. The perfect combination of flavors, mouth sizes, tongue textures, hands on necks, and @enzoo's perfume, which smelled even better with a nose hovering above the skin.

It was an unexpected encounter for both of them. It was just a lunch and a selfie on stories, but that kiss—such a perfect fit—was the sign of something more, of, who knows, maybe other things: traveling, photos on the beach, creating a joint profile, or even better, tagging each other as boyfriends on each other's posts, receiving likes, and even, what happened afterwards. Sex.

Their encounter without clothing merits a brief description: @enzoo a Barbie, totally waxed, even his armpits; @marvinho *au*

natural, dark hairs emphasizing his light skin. But that wasn't even the main course, like the kiss, the fit was precise. Air-conditioning as high as it would go, but still they sweated and gasped and, after showering, more kissing.

Everything was good. Even without perfume, @enzoo's scent ignited @marvinho. He wanted to do it all over again the next day, and again on Monday after work, even if he was tired, because @enzoo made @marvinho feel more alive; inside, his veins dilated to the point of his muscles becoming taut, because when the body is filled with desire, there is no means of escape. It makes the flesh pulse until it empties out in spasms.

@marvinho was becoming addicted to that sensation and he wanted more. Going crazy to the point of losing his senses, becoming alive in bed with his heart racing, all while @enzoo posted to his story: #AfterSexSelfie.

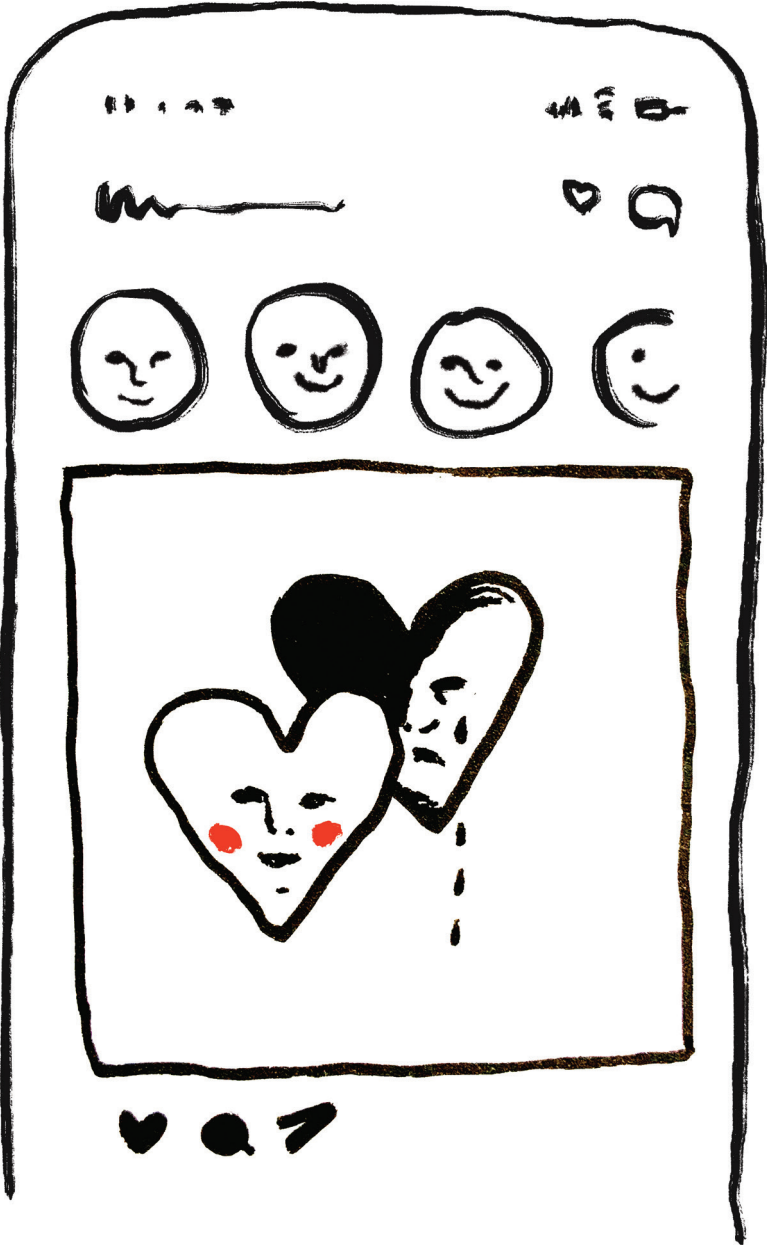
Three months later, the first trip: Gramado in the middle of winter. That dreamy landscape, with fog and hydrangeas, scarves and red noses. They walked hand-in-hand down Rua Coberta, kissed in the bay of Lago Negro, did an open-air city bus tour for tourists.

While @marvinho wanted to photograph the surroundings—the fallen leaves and textures of moss-covered walls—@enzoo busied himself with selfies, alone and as a couple, plates of food, videos of the fondue courses and of the woolen blankets draped over chairs at the restaurants.

They were three beautiful days, with sex every night, @marvinho each time more addicted to @enzoo's scent. He even posted to his feed a photo of golden leaves on the ground, moist from fog, with the caption:

@enzoo, you make me sure that after the winter, spring
breaks through

@enzoo merely liked it, didn't comment anything, and during their vacation posted only selfies of himself. @marvinho didn't find it weird—he was just bothered by the silence on the plane ride home. @enzoo said it was no big deal, that he was just tired. Instead of



cuddling on @marvinho's shoulder to sleep, he propped his head against the plane window.

After all those hours stuck together on the plane, @enzoo's scent was gone. Everything ended with poorly written messages on WhatsApp:

I'm not ready for a relationship	21:43
Maybe someday we'll talk again	21:43
For now it just won't work	21:43

@marvinho didn't understand anything and would have understood even less if @enzoo had been sincere and said that he ended the relationship because @marvinho wasn't photogenic: he always came out ugly in selfies and @enzoo's likes fell after they'd gotten together.

Even without understanding, @marvinho cried. He tried to talk to @enzoo, but his Instagram profile disappeared, his WhatsApp photo too. He tried DMing on Twitter, he even sent an email. When he ran out of options, he remembered that iPhones make calls, clicked on @enzoo's number, but it didn't ring.

No Signal

Match. Marcelle and Thomás began to chat. Without authorization, he sent a dick pic. She liked it and reciprocated with a discreet photo of her breasts. He sent more. In this way he came to know her plump lips even before she opened her mouth.

Their online chat went on for nearly three weeks, with full-on sentences, pictures of food, and more nudes. When they met up for the first time, Marcelle found his voice annoying, his smile, nevertheless, magnetic, the corner of his mouth a little crooked, charming. Thomás didn't like her floral perfume, a bit nauseating, but her breasts, however, were more inviting beyond the two-dimensional limits of photography.

That same night, his hands experienced the three-dimensionality of Marcelle's body. And they came, both of them. They didn't expect the size would fit.

On the second hookup, two days later, she invited Thomás to stay over. Their spooning also fit.

Google Search
how to know if i'm in love

She was gripped with a certain tingling when a text from him arrived on WhatsApp. She pretended as hard as she could, she didn't want to scare him, to be blocked and lose contact with him.

When she met Thomás, Marcelle's heart beat fast, her hands went cold. She disguised her feelings, she couldn't be rushed.

What a surprise when she opened TikTok that Sunday. Thomás had posted a video declaring that he was in love. Do you want to be my girlfriend, Celle? He asked with a bouquet of red roses in hand. More than 70 followers had already seen the video. In the comments:

Yes, Celle!
Accept! Accept!
He's the love of your life!
If she doesn't want him, I do!

Without thinking, Marcelle posted a video screaming YESSS.
Then, tears.

Google Search
restaurant for two

Google Search
natural makeup tutorial

At night, they went out for dinner at a Thai restaurant.

I don't know if it was the spicy seasoning, the shrimp, the likes, the crooked smile, the voluminous breasts, I do know that after dinner, they fucked as if trying to tear each other apart, a meteor burning up upon penetrating the atmosphere. They did everything, in every room, kitchen table, rug, bed, the shower.

– I love you – Thomás said.

Marcelle wrapped herself around him, hard. A tear ran down. He kissed it. They were even, her overflow was inside of Thomás.

Google Search
cheap apartment downtown

Google Search
shipping and moving

Google Search
plumbing

Google Search
how to use a coffee maker

Google Search
easy recipes for two

Google Search
my husband snores

Google Search
drive your woman crazy with oral sex

Google Search
pregnancy symptoms

Thomás came home with the test. He waited impatiently, lying on the sofa, for Marcelle to come back from the agency.

He arose, flustered, when he heard the key in the lock. He met Marcelle with a kiss. He couldn't contain his anxiety and asked that she take the test now, right now.

They went to the bathroom together.

They couldn't contain their cries.

Google Search
lab test to confirm pregnancy

Google Search
prenatal care

Google Search
how to deal with nausea

Google Search
i'm grossed out by my husband

Google Search
how to prevent stretch marks

Google Search
my wife avoids me during pregnancy

Google Search
is it normal to pee all the time during pregnancy

Google Search
baby names

Google Search
how to control weight during pregnancy

Google Search
boy names

Google Search
normal birth or c section

Google Search
doula near me

Enzo Gabriel was born in a plastic pool, in the apartment living room, at 11:45 a.m. on the 15th of March. Pisces with a rising sign in Aquarius, moon in Scorpio and Venus in Taurus.

Google Search
how to treat colic in babies

Google Search
dark and stinky poop

Google Search
Beatles for babies

Google Search
how to treat a belly button

Google Search
pediatrician

The doctor, Cristiano Sobral de Albuquerque, examined Enzo Gabriel without great attention. Normal weight, adequate height for a five-month-old.

– You're ready to introduce solid foods into his diet.

Google Search
homemade baby food

Roughly mashed banana with chunks of apple.

Thomás with his iPhone in hand.

– Enzo's first baby food, sharing this moment with you here on my story. Look at mom and baby.

Marcelle smiles, shows the plate of baby food to the camera.

On the first spoonful, Enzo Gabriel makes a face. His parents laugh. He spits up the baby food on his bib.

A big spoonful, little airplane flown into his pink mouth.

Thomás continues filming. Enzo Gabriel begins to move his head in a strange way. He swings his little hands. He didn't spit up the baby food.

– Babe, I think he's choking.

Marcelle shakes her son.

– Google it real quick.

Google Search
baby choking

– What does it say?

There is no Internet connection

Try:

- Checking the network cables, modem, and router
- Reconnecting to Wi-Fi
- Running Windows Network Diagnostics

ERR_INTERNET_DISCONNECTED

Thomás disconnects from Wi-Fi.

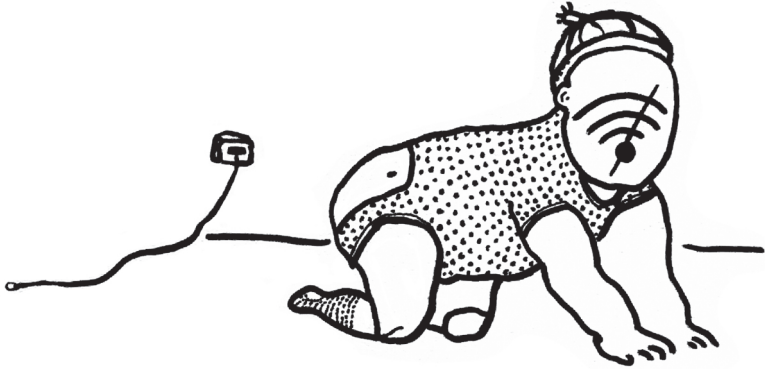
No 4G signal.

Marcelle panics with the baby in her arms. His white skin starts to change color.

Thomás walks to the living room, raising his iPhone in every direction.

Marcelle shakes Enzo Gabriel. Purple. His head falls.

Marcelle and Thomás look at each other, they don't know what to do, there's no signal.



Hunting Season I

Girl, have you downloaded the new app? 19:29
Which, bitch? 19:29 ✓✓
Fatality 19:29
It's blowing up 19:29
Nothing but cute boys 19:29
Hold up, let me download 19:31 ✓✓

Fatality is trying to access your Calendar
Allow
Fatality is trying to access your Photos
Allow
Fatality is trying to access your location
Allow
Activate GPS to open Fatality

submissive_23

height: 5'10"
weight: 160lbs
tribes: leather, fetish, toned
position: vers bottom
HIV status: I'm taking PrEP
bio: discreet guy looking to fuck around

Add profile picture

He uploads a picture of his ripped stomach.
He browses the profiles, then he's wracked with frustration:
nothing new, the same old queens as always and the discreet, DL,
married types.

He sends nudes via chat. He receives some back.

sup?
what are you looking for?

sup?
into?

sup?
top or bottom?

sup?
muscle top!

sup?
can you host?

sup?
down for what?

He gives up on trying to interact. He's tired after spending the day feeding Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, his personal accounts and the accounts he runs as a social media manager. The pain in his neck and back muscles is so great that he doesn't even log onto Skype to see if he could get into some cam sex before lying down.

He opens Spotify, puts his Most Played on shuffle, connects to his Bluetooth speaker and dances off to the bathroom.

He dubs a single by Iggy Pop in the mirror, donning his towel like a wig. Out of breath, he stops, studies his abs. They're losing definition. He needs to go to the gym more often; if not he'll lose Instagram likes and the boys he pulls on the apps.

He skips the Anitta feat. Lady Gaga feat. Pabllo Vittar feat. Inês Brasil track. Much too POC for his white-toned-middle-class-fluent-in-English taste.

– Sorry, bitches.

He gets into the shower lip-syncing a remix featuring RuPaul's catchphrases: "sashay away" . . . He uses the detachable shower head as a microphone. "Shantay, you stay" . . . The warm water and music help clear the tension from his back. "Eleganza extravaganza" . . . Feeling even more open, he'll order something to eat on iFood or

Uber Eats when he gets out of the shower, then binge a show on Netflix. “Can I get an amen?”

He interrupts the cover when he hears a strange noise coming from the living room.

Just a feeling. He goes back to his duet with the speaker.

Upon stepping out of the shower:

– Ahhhhhhhhhhhhh!

A man dressed in leather from head to toe, including a mask, stands frozen in the bathroom door.

– Who are you? How did you get in here?

– I’m from FATALITY.

– But I didn’t set anything up with anyone.

– You don’t need to set anything up. . .

– So that’s how it works? Like some fetish game.

– Like a game. . .

The man pulls out the stun gun.

– What a big pistol, you naughty thing. What happens now?

From the speaker echoes an old single by Lana Del Rey: “Born to Die.”

Hunting Season II

Ketlyn stares at the sky. Nothing to see there, not even smog clouds. Peteco and Toni are tired of waiting, their bellies rumbling, again, with that stomach-turning pain of emptiness, which grows even without increasing in size. She tells them to remain calm—the plan is going to work.

On the laptop’s cracked screen, Ketlyn watches the red dot approaching. It’s time. She launches the app. Interference in the geolocator makes the drone fly overhead in semicircles. It will be easier than planned—now it’s just a matter of redirecting the route and landing the drone on the roof.

The first step goes well. The drone starts to lose altitude, but the landing attempt activates its security system. Peteco and Toni jump to the neighbor’s roof, their thin and agile legs aiding their pursuit. The drone nearly gets stuck in the clothes hanging on Dona

Corina's clothesline. To curse the kids, a gust of warm wind lifts a sheet and the drone escapes.

– Quickly, the security system is trying to fight the interference. The drone won't stay in low altitude for very long – Ketlyn screams.

Toni quickens her pace and jumps to Mr. Jão's roof. She sees when the drone's yellow light turns on. She picks up momentum and leaps as high as she can. It's not enough to reach it.

– I lost control – Ketlyn screams again.

Toni lowers her shoulders and sighs, thinks that the plan had every reason to work out. Maybe if the laptop were newer, Ketlyn would have been able to hack the system and land the drone on the chalk X they had drawn on the roof.

It should've been just like the scenes they'd seen in movies; instead, they had to run along the roofs in vain, just to get worn out and increase their hunger even more. Toni breathes while watching the drone ascend.

– Damn.

It's all Peteco's fault; he never helps with anything. Toni is filled with rage, and when she turns to yell, she sees her brother lower the slingshot.

Peteco celebrates. The rock was dead-on. The drone falls, whirling. The two run to Dona Zulmira's patio, breathless.

The drone gets stuck in the guava tree. Toni climbs the branches, pricking her thin arms. She grabs the insulated bag attached to the drone and leaves its metal carcass stuck in the guava tree.

– We'd better bring it for Ketlyn to study. Who knows, maybe it would help improve the app – Peteco says.

He's right.

– Hold this then – Toni tosses him the insulated bag.

They return to the roof of their house, satisfied.

– I said it would work out – Ketlyn says.

– It only worked thanks to my aim – Peteco claims.

– Teamwork, bro – Toni retorts, while putting the drone next to the laptop with the cracked screen.

Peteco unzips the insulated bag and almost can't believe it: two complete Happy Meal combos.