

Tracy Winn
from *Izabel Tiago*

She hadn't seen the officer in the middle of Keene Street as he passed the other cramped houses like theirs — shoehorned in and surrounded with tarmac and chainlink. He wore a freshly ironed green uniform like the ones with the pins and ribbons that the recruiters wore at the mall. She hadn't known he was there until he put his foot on the bottom step.

The officer pulled a piece of paper out of his pocket and checked it against the street numbers. He had clear blue eyes and looked clean, as if he had been scrubbed pink from top to bottom with a scouring brush.

Thinking he'd come to deliver Lina's green card, she stood up. The recruiters had told Lina that if she became a citizen soldier with the National Guard, the government would fast track her application for citizenship starting with the work permit. Lina and Silverio had enlisted the day after they graduated from high school.

He said, "Is there a Darcia Araújo that lives here?" He didn't know how to pronounce Rupert's mother's name, got pinker, looked at her.

"She lives upstairs. Do you want me to get her?"

"No. No." The officer spoke very slowly and gently the way people do when they don't want to wake a baby. "Is there a bell?"

"It doesn't work."

"Well, then." He held the address on his knee as if he didn't know quite how he should stand. "Could I trouble you to get her?"

Izabel hopped down to the sidewalk, and bellowed, "Rupert!"

Rupert, who was almost a whole year younger than she was, appeared at the window like a short Pope come to bless the masses.

"Get your mother!"

The officer asked Izabel, "Does she speak English?"

Tracy Winn

“Not really.”

“Can you translate?”

Rupert’s mother, tall and pillowy, with a saggy soft face, opened the door part way. Red lipstick made her lips seem huge and loose.

The officer asked, “Darcia Araújo?” He took his hat off and held it in his hands in front of him. “The mother of Silverio Araújo?” Izabel repeated what he said.

Darcia nodded and kept her eyes fastened on his face while she let the door go behind her. Mamãe appeared like a shadow near the downstairs window.

“I am Army National Guard Notification Officer Phillip Benadetto.” Izabel turned the words into Portuguese. “I am sorry to report that your son was wounded in a roadside attack yesterday in Fallujah.”

Darcia wrapped her hands up tight in her apron.

Officer Benadetto said, “He was medevacced to a hospital in Germany.”

Izabel suddenly couldn’t speak. The words felt like bees on her tongue, fuzzy and dangerous. She remembered Silverio closing his eyes as he kissed Lina. She heard her heart thumping in her ears, and couldn’t say a thing.

Rupert stared at her from the shadows of the vestibule. He shambled shyly out on the top step next to his mother and asked, “What is medevacced?”

Officer Benadetto explained about the helicopter. Izabel’s tongue felt too big for her mouth.

Rupert looked quickly at Izabel and began to translate for his mother. His nose was running and the soft skin between his eyes puckered.

Izabel did not cry. More than anything, she wanted to be important in this.

“Within the week, I should have word on his condition.” Officer Benadetto saw the confusion on Rupert’s face and corrected himself. “I’ll tell you how he’s doing as soon as I know.”

Tracy Winn

Rupert started to translate, but Izabel couldn't stand the sound of his little boy voice.

When the officer said, "Your son, Silverio is a good soldier," both Izabel and Rupert said, "*Seu filho, Silverio...*" She narrowed her eyes at Rupert and turned red. She drowned him out, "He was following orders. His commanding officer reported that Private Araújo's humvee was leading a transport column. He couldn't have done anything differently or better than he was doing it. You should be proud."

Darcia's smudged lipstick made her look like she couldn't take care of the simplest thing. Rupert stared glumly at Izabel whose voice had won out, and jutted his jaw. Darcia blinked, and wrapped and unwrapped her hands in her apron. She said "Thank you" to the officer as if her voice came through layers of cloth.

Officer Benadetto put his hat back on his head and said he was sorry. He'd be back when he had more news. Mamãe stepped out quietly and led Darcia back inside as if she was suddenly very old.