

## THE MALANDRO

“A kilo of *pão francês* and ten *pães de queijo, né,*” a squat lady with thin eyebrows and a white apron shouted from behind the counter. “As always,” a tall, slim man responded. “How are the kids,” he asked as she extracted the fluffy white bread from the clear plastic bin. “They’re great,” she answered back. The woman paused and reached for an extra cheese bread. “Here, have one to go,” she said as she winked at him. “*Valeu,*” he thanked as he took the bags and handed her the money.

Marcos found a chair outside and sat down. He took out the extra roll and bit into it. The golden brown crust was hard to the teeth, but the inside of the bread was still soft and warm. He chewed the roll slowly and drank in the sights of his neighborhood. The sun’s rays clung to the air like laundry hanging from clotheslines. Buildings painted purple, green, pink, and yellow were interspersed between the cinderblock houses. Farmers selling guava, pineapple, starfruit, and oranges lined the sidewalks. The scent of minced garlic frying in oil oozed from the window of the new restaurant with the blue and green mosaic backsplash. It mingled with clanging chatter of customers who were just finishing their lunch. Sounds of children playing soccer bounced against the walls like the buzz of bees. A ball rolled towards him. Marcos grinned and threw it back to the boys playing in the street. “*Valeu, Marcos,*” the oldest bellowed. Marcos smiled to himself. “*Eu sou bem conhecido aqui,*” he thought to himself proudly, “I’m very well-known here.” With that thought, he finished his roll and turned right onto the main street.

At the end of the road stood a heavy middle aged woman clad in a pink flowered dress selling *açaí*. Next to her stand was a faded Brazilian flag painted onto the wall. She was one of

ten vendors on the block, but she was Marcos' favorite all the same. "*Oi, Fátima,*" he greeted. "*Oi, querido,*" she said, "Come by later, I'll save some for you." "Thanks," he answered.

Marcos stopped to check his reflection in the glare of the pharmacy window. A tattoo of a wolf peeked out from under the black strap of his favorite shirt. He touched his charcoal hair. It felt bristly to his fingers and was getting a bit too long for his taste. He had been cursed with what they called "bad hair," hair that turned curly and coarse when left uncut. "I'll have to see Claudio," he thought. An old man wearing a tattered white wife beater and jeans patted him on the back. "*Oi, Claudio, how are you,*" Marcos shook his hand. Claudio was his barber. "Great to see you, *cara,*" Claudio said. "You too," he replied. "*Oi, Marcos,*" a petite, curvaceous girl with acid green eye shadow and tight denim shorts hollered from across the street. "Hey, Renatinha," he answered. A motorcycle honked. Marcos turned his head. A lanky fourteen-year-old riding on the back of a motorcycle waved at him. "*E aí, Luis,*" he said. "*E aí, mano,*" Luis responded. Marcos swelled with pride and smiled to himself. "*Eu sou bem conhecido aqui.* I am very well-known here," he declared under his breath.

He turned the corner and found the striped awning that shaded the patio of his favorite *boteco*. A group of old men sat around a plastic red table with a faded Devassa advertisement, throwing down cards between sips of beer and gossip. Others nostalgically strummed a classic samba melody as the admiring elderly ladies danced along. Marcos smiled, imagining that this was what he would do when he reached their age.

Half-empty bottles of imported liquors sat on the shelves gathering dust, resigned to sit in front of the faded brown tiles that lined the walls. Next to the shelves, there was a man sitting expectantly with a basket of *aipim*. Julio was the local head of the Civil Police. He resembled a

washed up eighties one-hit wonder with his long, artificially-dyed brown hair and faded Flock of Seagulls t-shirt. "Please, sit down," Julio strained in an awkward, broken English. Julio spoke a little English, though the *gringos*, or foreigners, never seemed to understand him. Marcos shook his hand and took a seat. Julio filled the empty glass, and handed it to him. Marcos picked up the bottle, glanced at the label, and chortled. "Skol. *Malandro*, you know me too well," he remarked. He raised his head towards Julio. "So what's going on," Marcos asked.

"Well, I just talked to Wellington at the Tourism Police," Julio began. "Oh yeah, what'd he have to say?" Marcos inquired. "Lots of express kidnappings these days," Julio continued. "A hot French girl just came in yesterday. Great ass. A van picked her up near Mena Barreto and N.S. da Copacabana. They asked to go to Lapa, but the driver and two of his friends gang raped her before forcing her to withdraw \$3000 from an ATM in Catete. Then they threw her out in the middle of Jurujuba."

"Yeah, well, Jurujuba's the right place to drop them off," Marcos joked. Jurujuba was where the mental hospital was. Julio suppressed a laugh, but his face grew serious. "*Olha só, cara*, this is the third time I've gotten a report like this in the past month." Julio remarked. He paused and tilted his head towards Marcos. "You wouldn't happen to know anything about it, would you," he insinuated. "Why would I?" Marcos countered nonchalantly. "That's the odd thing; they all tell the same story of a guy with a tattoo of a wolf," Julio said. "So? That's a pretty common animal," Marcos shot back quickly.

"Well, I didn't really think I needed to investigate anything because you know how girls are around here, drawing attention to themselves and trying to make a mess with those short skirts and tight shorts. I assumed they were asking for it," Julio continued, "But then it happened

to a *gringa*, and that's odd because we love foreigners. We can't have a report like this making international news when we're so close to the Olympics."

Marcos took a sip of beer and calmly held Julio's gaze. "Hey, where's Paula sleeping these days?" he prodded casually. Julio's pupils dilated. His shoulders tensed. He made a fist. Paula was his mistress. "How do you know about that," Julio demanded.

"I have my ways," Marcos responded coolly, "Your wife doesn't need to know, if she doesn't have a reason to." Julio pursed his lips and inhaled sharply. He glared at Marcos. "I'm sure we'll find a way to cover this up," Julio said after a moment. "I'm glad we have an understanding," Marcos agreed. He shook Julio's hand and with it passed over a large roll of bills. "Nobody needs to know," he whispered in Julio's ear. Julio nodded. Marcos paid his tab and began to walk out. "Oh, Marcos," Julio called. "Yes," he answered. "Import taxes are high. Only eat Brazilian from now on. It tastes better," Julio advised. "Understood," Marcos said.

As he mounted his motorcycle and headed towards the exit leading to Copacabana, Marcos couldn't help but feel proud of himself. He murmured to himself under his helmet, "*Eu sou bem conhecido aqui*. I am very well-known here."