

Family in Arms
(for Sofia Chavez Ledford)

Terri Lynn Cummings

Born in central Mexico, she drove poverty
under the plow and pushed back from tables
where machismo fists pounded laws; worried

about family scratching food from high desert
mountains furrowed by rows of parched corn
like the sun-cracked skin of her father's forehead;

tired of skirting stray skeletons of dogs, trucks,
and neighbors plucked from thin soil by bandits;
avoided villages poisoned from wells of drugs,

their governors split and stacked by need
and greed; watched mescal burn her brothers'
hopes on pyres of wrecked dreams; walked

from the house where she was born. Two rooms
had sheltered thirteen siblings, parents, and her
from bullets of threat, kidnapping, murder. When

the branch of a distant tree, laden with freedom's
fruit, beckoned its finger, she followed. In the
United States, she was easy to read – brown skin,

accent, shadowed eyes betrayed her upturned lips.
Low-skilled jobs filled fields avoided by Americans,
welcomed her advances. In time, she married an

American, bore two children stained in suspicion,
branded "bi-lingual." Her presence illegal, she
applied for a green card (after crossing the border)

like shoplifting a country and returning it to a store.
The US did not want Mexicans, except hands and
backs. Their strong family values did not reflect

well in US mirrors. Her lawyer predicted six months,

and she returned to Mexico without children, without
husband, begged forgiveness, prayed for approval,

replaced large questions, *Will I go home? When will
I know?* with labor – one dollar an hour, sixty hours
a week. Months labored into years, bent her back,

broke husband and children. She sold shoes with
nowhere to go, collected cans from gutters, hawked
them for food. Three years, six lawyers, one senator

later, she arrived in US, green card in hand,
relief in shoulders, stones in eyes, family in arms.
Her eyes have not changed.

Discussion questions for the poem *Family in Arms*:

1. What does this poem tell us about the motivation of many immigrations to come the United States?
 2. How do current immigration policies damage families?
 3. Do you think it was important to Sofia that her children be raised in this country even if she was not able to be with them? Explain.
 4. How different do you think Sofia's life will be in the United States now that she has her "green card"?
 5. What should the role of social workers be in trying to change immigration policy?
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