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First Person

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First Person

Flat Fix Shop, 1245 Jerome Ave., The Bronx. I met Bella on a hot day in August. This was on Jerome Avenue, where rezoning plans for the area were threatening the hard-won livelihoods of working mechanics, tailors, cooks, and street vendors. With a few other photographers, I had set out to document the stories told under the elevated 4 Train. The bustling tire shop was worked by guys ranging from their early 20s to mid 60s. They bickered good-naturedly as Bella sat nearby, calm and ready to work. I asked to interview her and details of her life started to pour out: family

struggles in Brazil, coming to New York to find a new life. Bella was tough, serious, and happy. I took three photos of her and didn't know whether it would lead to a good print until I saw the film developed. When I did, I felt an unnerving sense of satisfaction. Finally, I was making the type of pictures I wanted to make. I checked back after a few weeks but Bella was gone, moved to another shop. I never saw her again but I was told she came to our exhibition, saw her portrait, and loved it. —Edwin Torres '12