The house on Mango Street

We did not always lived on Mango Street. Before that we lived on Loomis on the third floor; and before that we lived on Keeler. Before Keeler is was Paulina, and before that I cannot remember. But what I remember most is moving a lot. Each time it seemed there’d be one more of us. By the time we got to Mango Street we were six – mama, papa, Carlos Kiki, my sister Nenny, and me. The house on Mango Street is ours, and we do not have to pay rent to anybody, or share the yard with the people downstairs, or be careful not to make too much noise, and the is not a landlord banging on the ceiling with a broom. But even so, it is not the house we’d thought we’d get.

We had to leave the flat on Loomis quick. The water pipes broke and the landlord would not fix them because the house was too old. We had to leave fast. We were using the washroom next door and carrying water over in empty milk gallons. That is why Mama and Papa looked for a house, and that is why we moved into the house on Mango Street, far away, on the others side of town.

They always told us that one day we would move into a house, a real house that would be ours for always so we would not have to move each year. And our house would have running water and pipes that worked. And inside it would have real stairs, not hallways stairs, but stairs inside like the houses on T.V. And we’d have a basement and at least three washrooms so when we took a bath we would not have to tell everybody. Our house would be white with trees around it, a great big yard and grass growing without a fence. This was the house Papa talked about when he held a lottery ticket and this was the house Mama dreamed up in the stories she told us before we went to bed.

But the house on mango Street is not the way they told it at all. It is small and red with tight steps in front and widows so small you’d think they were holding their breath. Bricks are crumbling in places, and the front door is so swollen you have to push hard to get in. There is no front yard, only four little elms the city planted by the curb. Our back is a small garage for the car we do not own yet and a small yard that looks smaller between the two buildings on either side. There are stairs in your house, but they’re ordinary hallway stairs and the house has only one washroom. Everybody has to share a bedroom – Mama and Papa, Carlos and Kiki, me and Nenny.

Once when we were living on Loomis, a nun from my school passed by and saw me playing out front. The Laundromat downstairs had been boarded up because it had been robbed two days before and the owner had painted on the wood YES WE’RE OPEN so as not to lose business.

Where do you live? She asked.

There, I said pointing up to the third floor.

You live there?

There. I had to look to where she pointed – the third floor, the paint peeling, wooden bars Papa had nailed on the windows so we would not fall out. You live there? The way she said it made me feel like nothing.

There. I lived there. I nodded.

I knew then I had to have a house. A real house. One I could point to. But this is not it. The house on Mango Street is not it. For the time being, Mama says. Temporary, says Papa. But I know how those things go.