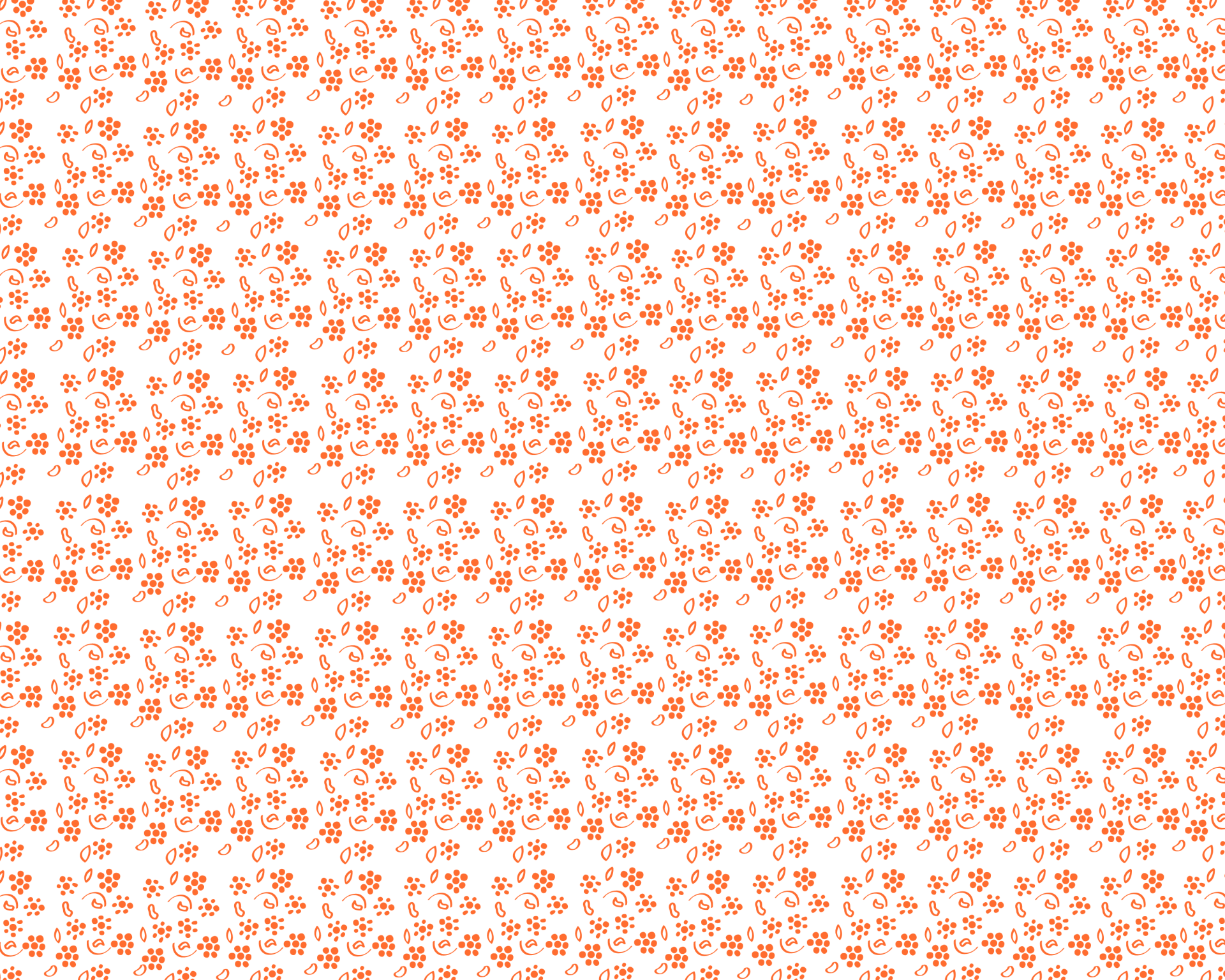


A HOME I VES EXPERIENCED



A HOME I  VE
EXPERIENCED

Written and Designed by Leyla Arici



This book is dedicated to my amazing mamá, Ebelice González, who does so much for me and the people she loves.

The entrance to my grandma's house and the walk-up to the apartments upstairs.



Almost every Friday my family drives down from Connecticut to stay at my grandma's for the weekend. Our car ride there consists of an hour of my mom blasting the latest Pop songs on the radio and my three sisters fighting over who's going to get the front seat on the way back. Even though I'm the oldest of the bunch we've gotten to the age where the front seat is no longer designated to me, resulting in my sisters racing me to the car every time we have to go somewhere. Today, I lost our weekly battle and am sitting in the back seat next to my youngest sister, Haley.

My grandma lives in University Heights in the Bronx. Her neighborhood feels like a different world from the tiny suburb I grew up in.

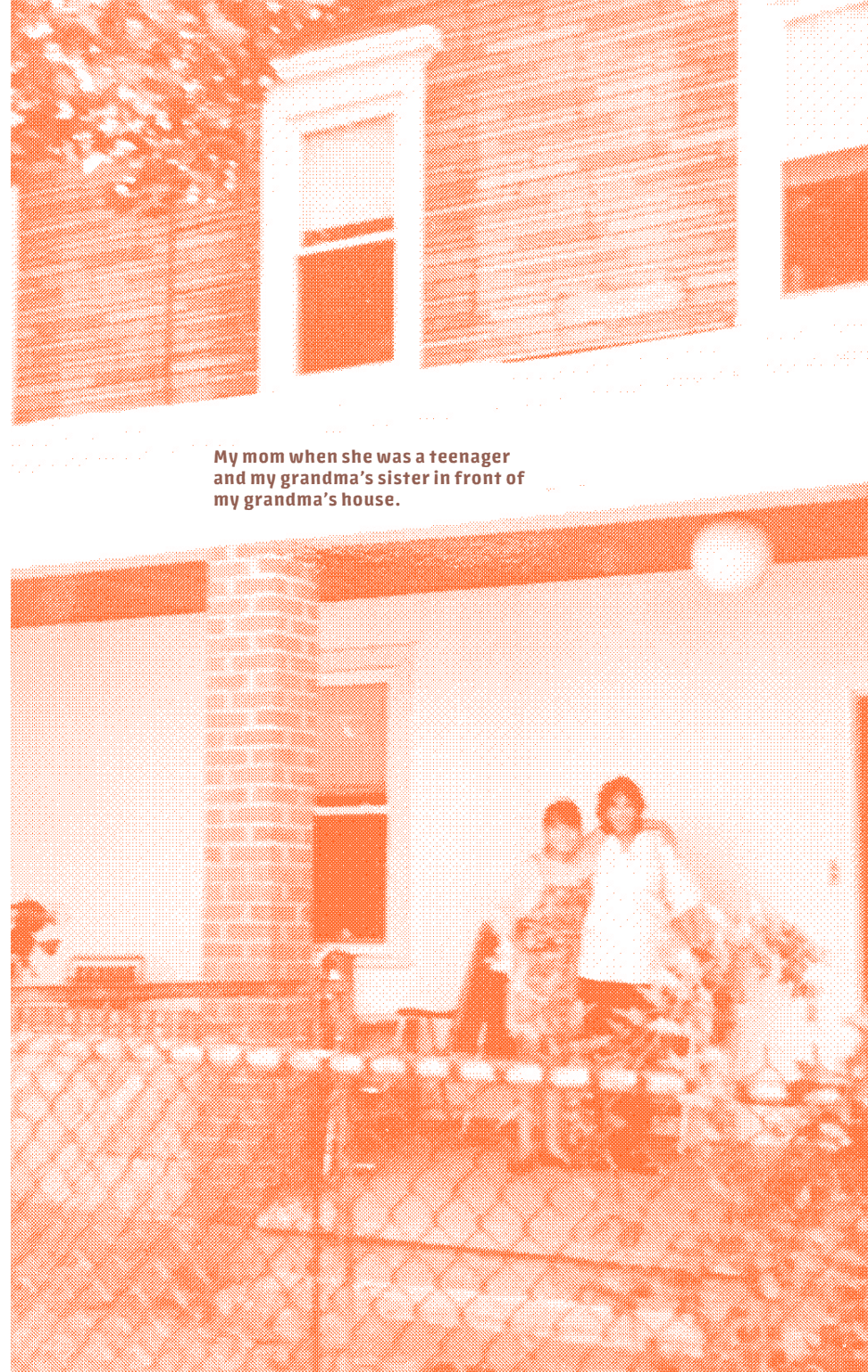
When we near her house, I see people mingle on the street corner next to the bodega leading up to her street. As we turn the corner, I spot a black

cat licking its paws sitting on a soda crate and put my nose up to the window to take a closer look. Next to the cat, two men sit between a foldable table and play dominos, each holding a cigarette in their hand.

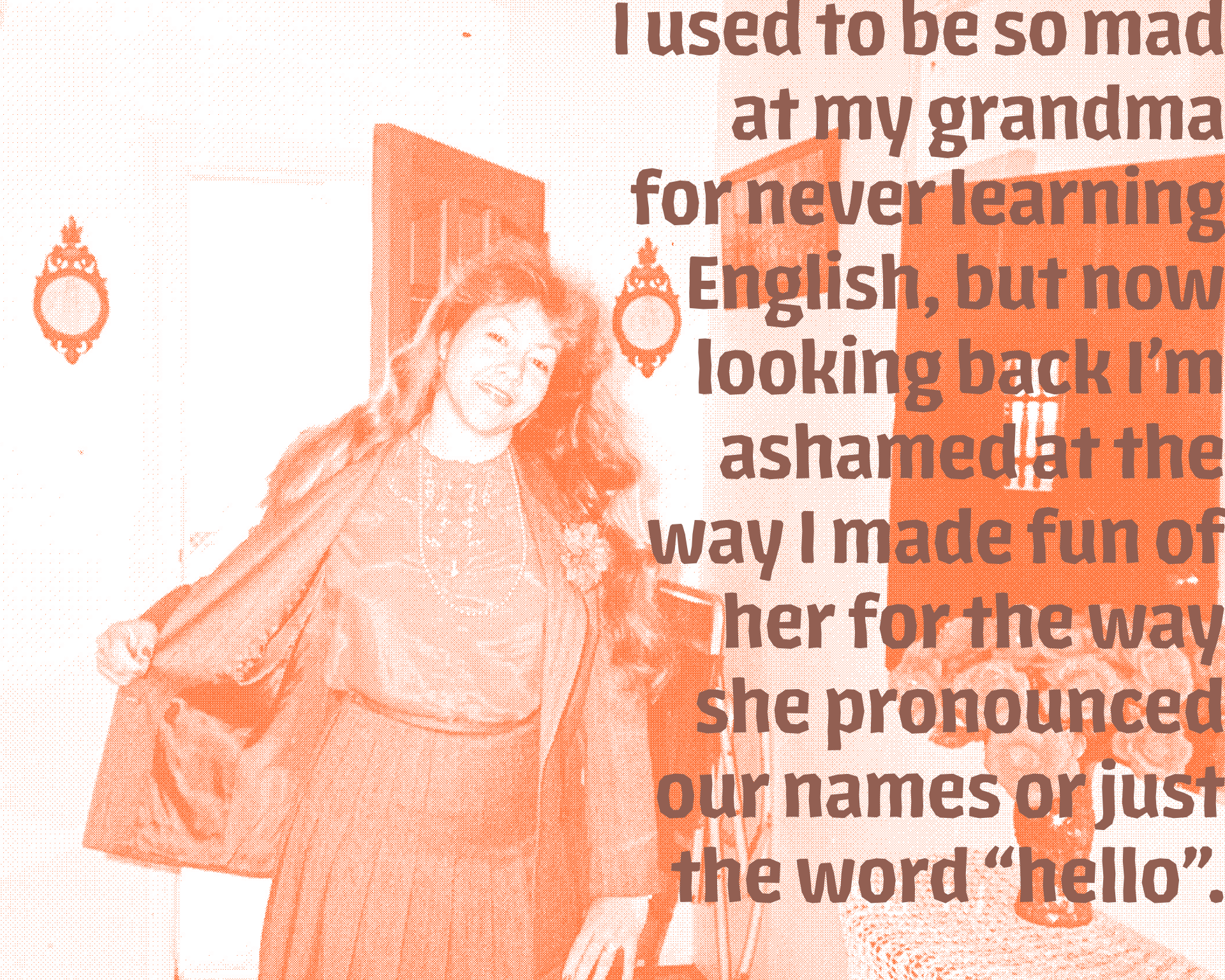
The street leading up to grandma's house is a steep hill with rows of tall apartment buildings. I recognize Dominican and Puerto Rican flags hanging from some of the windows leading up to my grandma's. Her house is located amongst a community of hispanic immigrants, specifically Caribbeans. My grandma can't speak English so her neighborhood makes her feel accepted and understood. I used to be so mad at my grandma for never learning English, but now looking back I'm ashamed at the way I made fun of her for the way she pronounced our names or just the word "hello".

I watch as people walk up and down the street and make up stories in my head about where they are headed. There are kids getting out of school running down the street, some accompanied by parents, and others walking in groups of five or more. My focus then switches to my mom as she maneuvers around double parked cars on each side of the street until my grandma's house is finally within view.

Her house sticks out like a sore thumb amongst all the apartment buildings surrounding it—a beige suburban, colonial house in the city. She's the landlord to her house and only lives on the first floor. She rents out the second and third



My mom when she was a teenager and my grandma's sister in front of my grandma's house.



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A close up photo of my grandma's house from the outside.



She even tends to a small garden of different colored roses— oranges, yellows, pinks, and the deepest reds.



floor and I always see her tenants walking in and out, going to work, or just stopping on the porch to chat with my grandma.

Her house is a rarity in New York with its large tiled porch and medium sized front yard. She even tends to a small garden of different colored roses— oranges, yellows, pinks, and the deepest reds. Her garden and house is then enclosed by dark painted iron gates.

As my mom pulls into the driveway, I see my grandma sitting on the porch on her favorite rocking chair.

I immediately jump out of the car and run to give her a hug.

“Hola, Hola!” My grandma says while squeezing me a little harder. “¿Cómo estás Leyla?”

“¡Muy bien Mamá!”

In Dominican culture it’s very common to call your grandma mom, or “Mamá”, because they are viewed as your second mother and an equal caregiver. My grandma also doesn’t like to be called “abuela” because she says it makes her feel old. My sisters each yell “¡Mamá!” as they run up next to me to get their own hugs.

My mom is the last one to greet my grandma with a big hug and kiss on the cheek.

My grandma has fair skin and dyed blonde hair. Her makeup is applied the same way every time I see her, with blue eyeliner and red lipstick. Today she is wearing skinny jeans, a red blouse, wedge heels, and dangly gold earrings and other

accessories. She always looks her best and never leaves her house without a glamorous outfit or her hair and makeup done. She looks very young for her age and takes pride in it. However, till this day she won't tell me her exact age but I know it's somewhere in the sixties.

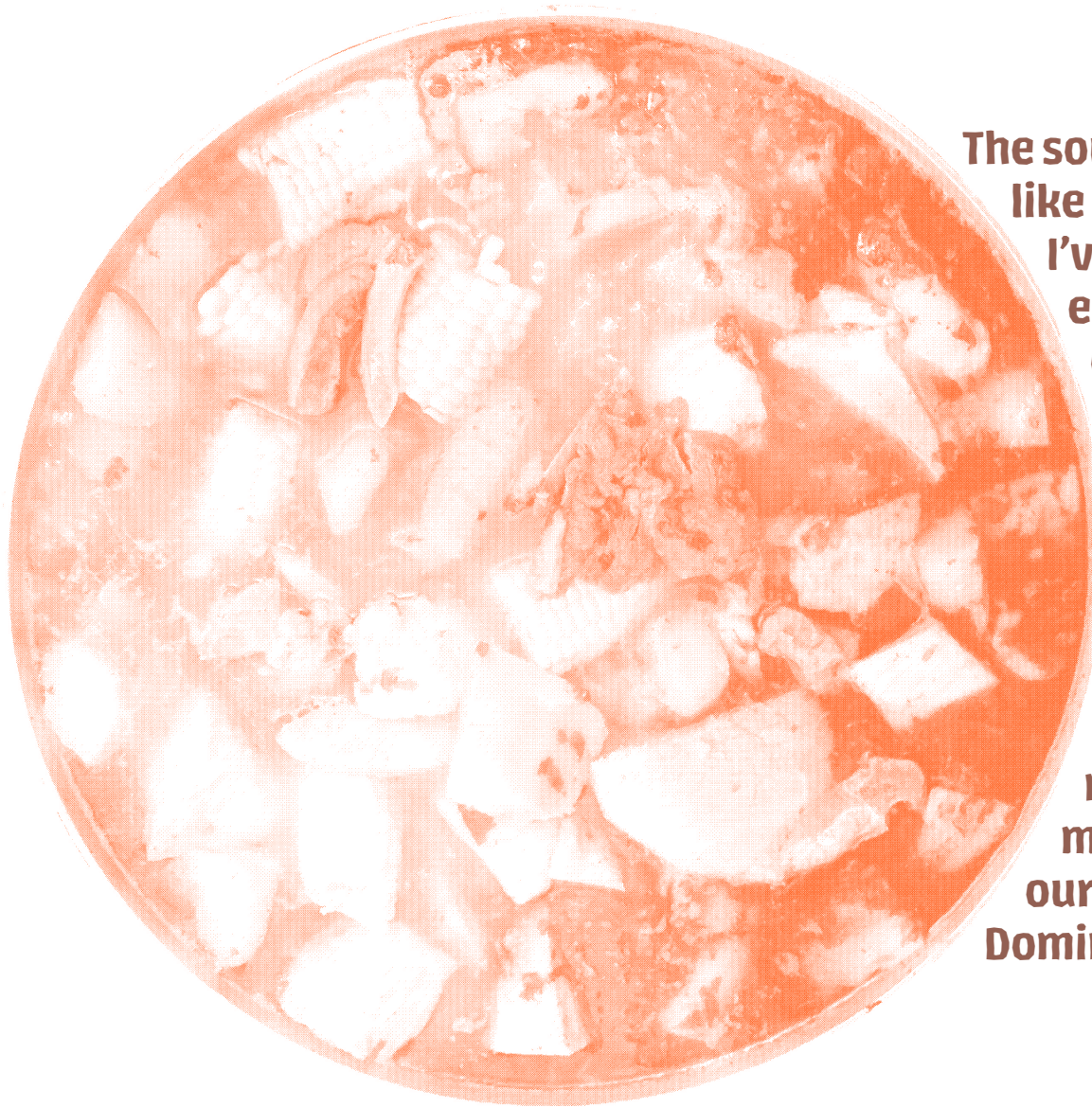
A smile hasn't left my grandma's face since we arrived. Even now as I walk into the kitchen for dinner I'm greeted with her smile as I sit at the table.

Garlic, oregano, and cilantro blend together, filling the wooden kitchen with their scent. It smells like home and home to smell. A place only my mom and grandma can create.

I sit on a chair of twine and dark painted wood—something that could easily be found at the nearest Salvation Army. My grandma brings me a big steaming plate of sancocho with a side of rice and avocado. She piles the plate high, like she always does, serving for three instead of one.

The soup tastes like a home I've never truly experienced: of bay leaves, sofrito and saffron, of yuca, platano, and yam, of corn, chicken, beef and pork. The smell alone reminds me of my grandma and our family in the Dominican Republic.





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MAMA'S



SANCOCHO

PICTURES FROM THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC



These images are meant to represent the home my grandma experienced and the home where my grandma's sancocho originates.



