

Sandra Cisneros



The House on
Mango Street

"Sandra Cisneros is one of the most brilliant of today's young writers. Her work is sensitive, alert, nuanced... rich with music and picture."—Gwendolyn Brooks



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We didn't always live on Mango Street. Before that we lived on Loomis on the third floor, and before that we lived on Keeler. Before Keeler it was Paulina, and before that I can't 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 don't have to pay rent to anybody, or share the yard with the people downstairs, or be careful not to make too much noise, and there isn't a landlord banging on the ceiling with a broom. But even so, it's 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 wouldn't 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's why Mama and Papa looked for a house, and that's why we moved into the house on Mango Street, far away, on the other 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 wouldn't have to move each year. And our house would have running water and pipes that worked. And inside it would have real stairs, not hallway 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 wouldn't 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's small and red with tight steps in front and windows 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. Out back is a small garage for the car we don't own yet and a small yard that looks smaller between the two buildings on either side. There are stairs in our 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 wouldn't 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 isn't it. The house on Mango Street isn't it. For the time being, Mama says. Temporary, says Papa. But I know how those things go.

Fiction/Literature

"Cisneros draws on her rich [Latino] heritage... and seduces with precise, spare prose, creat[ing] unforgettable characters we want to lift off the page. She is not only a gifted writer, but an absolutely essential one."



—Bebe Moore Campbell, *The New York Times Book Review*

Told in a series of vignettes stunning for their eloquence, *The House on Mango Street* is Sandra Cisneros's greatly admired novel of a young girl growing up in the Latino section of Chicago. Acclaimed by critics, beloved by children, their parents and grandparents, taught everywhere from inner-city grade schools to universities across the country, and translated all over the world, it has entered the canon of coming-of-age classics.

Sometimes heartbreaking, sometimes deeply joyous, *The House on Mango Street* tells the story of Esperanza Cordero, whose neighborhood is one of harsh realities and harsh beauty. Esperanza doesn't want to belong—not to her rundown neighborhood, and not to the low expectations the world has for her. Esperanza's story is that of a young girl coming into her power, and inventing for herself what she will become.

"Marvelous...spare yet luminous. The subtle power of Cisneros's storytelling is evident. She communicates all the rapture and rage of growing up in a modern world."

—*San Francisco Chronicle*

"A deeply moving novel...delightful and poignant.... Like the best of poetry, it opens the windows of the heart without a wasted word."

—*Miami Herald*

Cover design by Lorraine Louie
Cover illustration by Nivia Gonzalez
Author photograph © Rubén Guzmán

U.S. \$10.95 CAN. \$15.95

ISBN 0-679-73477-5



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