

Latina Uprooted

Olivia Pretorius

My mother never taught me to roll my "r's" since the playground glares and "talking funny" whispers of her youth chased her into her 30's. In red states, speaking Spanish is often met with sideways glances, hushed conversations, and uttering "immigrant" like it's stained. My abuelo tells me when a cop pulls him over, he presents his military ID so that he won't be talked down to.

I used to dance cumbia with my primas in my grandparents' living room. As Jesus watched from most of the walls, I watched abuelo pray the rosary and abuela cook empanadas. Abuelita rarely moved from the cracked burgundy couches where she lived in novelas. All I could say to her was *te amo abuelita, buenas noches*.

My heritage hides like a shadow in the corner of a cathedral I don't attend. My tongue wakes up American. I'm light enough. I will never face the fears of my abuelo when red and blue lights flash. I want to find a home in the countries I come from, but when I speak the words get tangled in my lungs. I have become a nomad girl, belonging to no flag. My culture is a ghost unseen in my body.