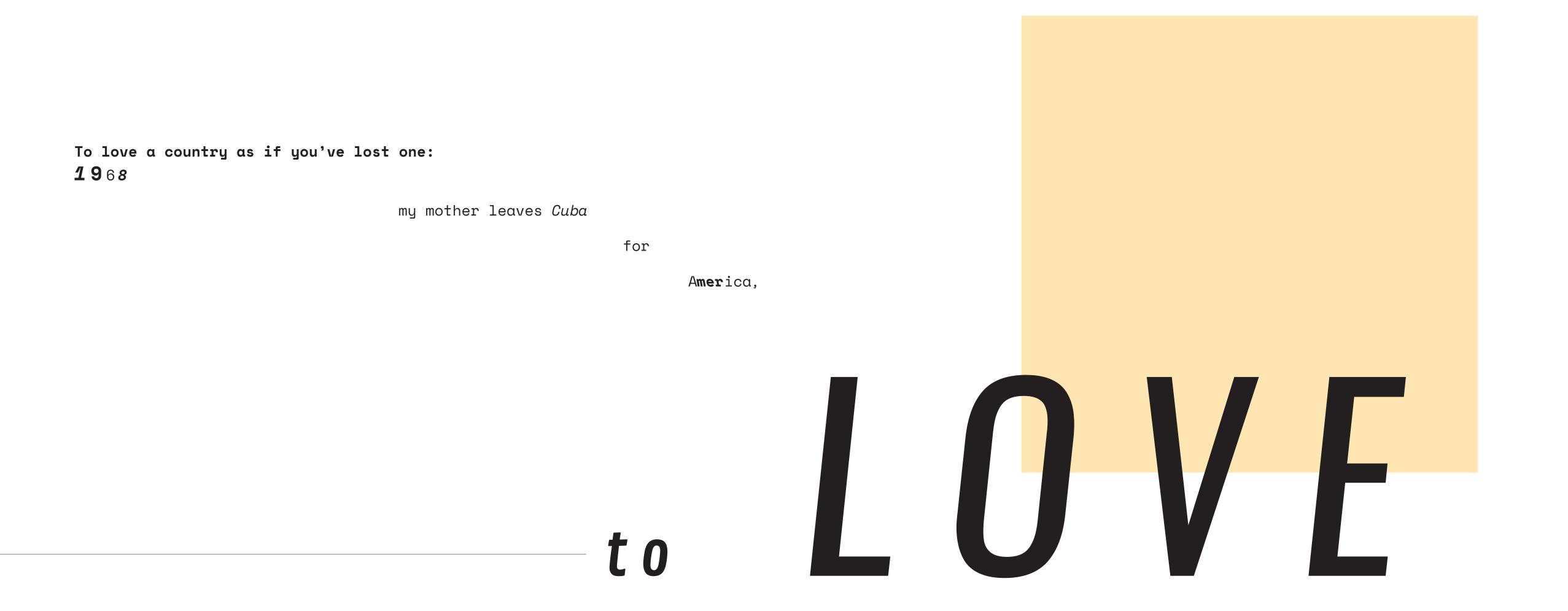
Richard Blanco from Cuba to New York City in 1968 Source: Mother Country by Richard Blanco Designed by Hannah Cai

"I lift my lamp beside the golden door"

I wonder if my parents consider America as their home; if they love this country. Or if they only moved here for better opportunities for themselves, and for me and my little brother.



one foot inside a plane destined for a country she knew only as a name,

C O U N T R Y

her other foot anchored to the platform of her patria, her hand clutched around one suitcase, taking only what she needs most

hand-colored photographs of her family her wedding veil the doorknob of her house a jar of dirt from her backyard goodbye letters she wont open for years

To love a country as if you've lost one: I hear her reading picture books over my shoulder at bedtime, both of us learning **Eng**lish, **sound**ing **out** words as **strange** as the **talk**ing **an**imals and **fair**-haired

princesses in their pages.

as if you've

I taste her first attempts at macaroni-n-cheese (but with chorizo and peppers), and her shame over Thanks**gi**ving **tur**keys always dry, but countered by her perfect pork pernil and garlic yuca.

To love a country as if you've lost one:

forever, America from departing as if it were *you* on a plane

the last scene in which you're a madman scribbling the names of your favorite flowers, and birds you'd never see again,
your address and phone number you'd never use again,
the color of your father's eyes, your mother's hair,

terrified you could forget these

"You know, mijo, it isn't where you're born that matters, it's where you choose to diethat's your country."

Richard Blanco is the first immigrant, the first Latino, the first openly gay person and the youngest person to be the U.S. inaugural poet.

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