

NATIONAL BESTSELLER

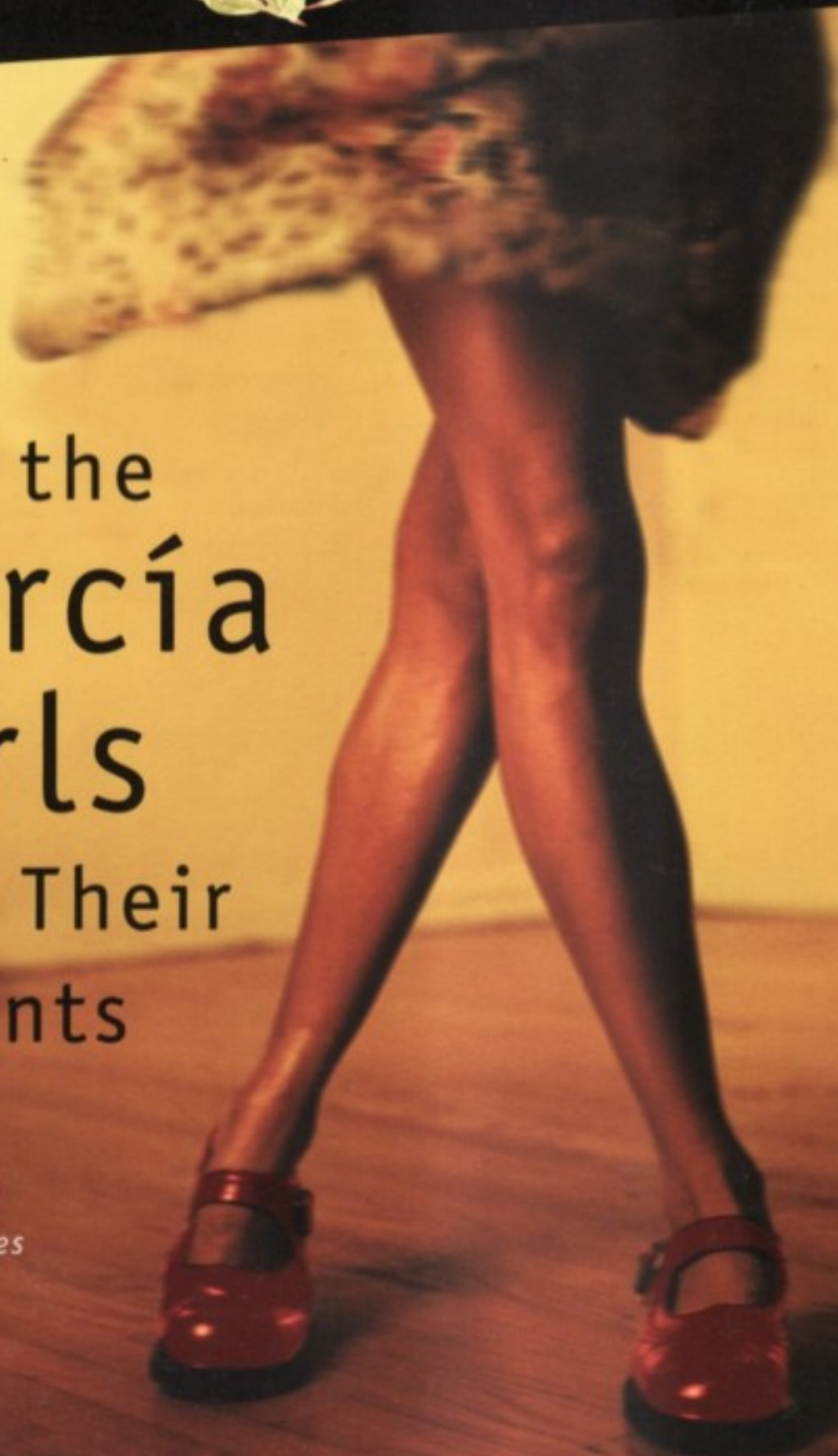


Julia Alvarez

Author of
*In the Name
of Salomé*

How the
**García
Girls**
Lost Their
Accents

"Simply
wonderful."
—*Los Angeles
Times*



Antojos



Yolanda

The old aunts lounge in the white wicker armchairs, flipping open their fans, snapping them shut. Except that more of them are dressed in the greys and blacks of widowhood, the aunts seem little changed since five years ago when Yolanda was last on the Island.

Sitting among the aunts in the less comfortable dining chairs, the cousins are flashes of color in turquoise jumpsuits and tight jersey dresses.

The cake is on its own table, the little cousins clustered around it, arguing over who will get what slice. When their squabbles reach a certain mother-annoying level, they are called away by their nursemaids, who sit on stools at the far end of the patio, a phalanx of starched white uniforms.

Before anyone has turned to greet her in the entryway, Yolanda sees herself as they will, shabby in a black cotton skirt and jersey top, sandals on her feet, her wild black hair held back with a hairband. Like a missionary, her cousins will say,

like one of those Peace Corps girls who have let themselves go so as to do dubious good in the world.

A maid peeks out of the pantry into the hall. She is a skinny brown woman in the black uniform of the kitchen help. Her head is covered with tiny braids coiled into rounds and pinned down with bobby pins. "Doña Carmen," she calls to Yolanda's hostess aunt, "there are no matches. Justo went to Doña Lucinda's to get some."

"*Por Dios, Iluminada,*" Tía Carmen scolds, "you've had all day."

The maid stares down at the interlaced hands she holds before her, a gesture that Yolanda remembers seeing illustrated in a book for Renaissance actors. These clasped hands were on a page of classic gestures. *The gesture of pleading*, the caption had read. Held against the breast, next to the heart, the same interlaced hands were those of *a lover who pleadeth for mercy from his beloved*.

The gathering spots Yolanda. Her cousin Lucinda leads a song of greeting with an off-key chorus of little cousins. "Here she comes, Miss America!" Yolanda clasps her brow and groans melodramatically as expected. The chorus labors through the first phrase and then rushes forward with hugs, kisses, and—from a couple of the boys—fake karate kicks.

"You look terrible," Lucinda says. "Too thin, and the hair needs a cut. Nothing personal." She is the cousin who has never minced her words. In her designer pantsuit and frosted, blown-

out hair, Lucinda looks like a Dominican magazine model, a look that has always made Yolanda think of call girls.

"Light the candles, light the candles!" the little cousins say, taking up a chant.

Tía Carmen lifts her open hands to heaven, a gesture she no doubt picked up from one of her priest friends. "The girl forgot the matches."

"The help! Every day worse," Tía Flor confides to Yolanda, flashing her famous smile. The cousins refer to their Tía Flor as "the politician." She is capable of that smile no matter the circumstances. Once, the story goes, during who-knows-which revolution, a radical young uncle and his wife showed up at Tía Flor's in the middle of the night wanting asylum. Tía Flor greeted them at the door with the smile and "How delightful of you to stop by!"

"Let me tell you about the latest at *my* house," Tía Flor goes on. "The chauffeur was driving me to my novena yesterday. Suddenly the car jerks forward and dies, right there on the street. I'm alarmed, you know, the way things are, a big car stalled in the middle of the university *barrio*. I say, *César, what can it be?* He scratches his head. *I don't know, Doña Flor.* A nice man stops to help, checks it all—and says, *Why, señora, you're out of gas.* Out of gas! Can you imagine?" Tía Flor shakes her head at Yolanda. "A chauffeur who can't keep a car in gasoline! Welcome home to your little Island!" Grinning, she flips open her fan. Beautiful wild birds unfold their silver wings.

At a proprietary yank from one of the little cousins, Yolanda

"POIGNANT...POWERFUL...BEAUTIFULLY CAPTURES THE
THRESHOLD EXPERIENCE OF THE NEW IMMIGRANT,
WHERE THE PAST IS NOT YET A MEMORY."

—THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW

When their father's part in a plot against a cruel dictator forces them to flee the Dominican Republic, the García sisters—Carla, Sandra, Yolanda, and Sofía—come to America. But 1960s New York City is vastly different from the genteel, if troubling, existence they left behind, a world marked by maids, manicures, a loving family, and disappearances, secret police raids, growing political unrest. What the sisters have lost—and what they find—is revealed in this exquisite novel from one of the premier novelists of our time.



In America, the García girls try to assimilate into the mainstream by ironing their hair, forgetting their Spanish, and meeting boys unchaperoned. Through it all, they remain caught between the old world and the new. With zestful humor and rare insight, Julia Alvarez evokes the uncertainties and joys of belonging to two distinct cultures in a buoyant novel full of irrepressible spirit.

"Enchanting." —*People*

"Tender, charming...The writing is charged
with a poetic intensity that is truly original." —*The Miami Herald*

"A tumultuous family get-together, full of warmth, laughter, and bickering."
—*St. Petersburg Times*

"Delightful." —*Cosmopolitan*