

HOW THE GARCIA GIRLS LOST THEIR ACCENTS

A Play by Karen Zacarías
Adapted from the best selling novel by Julia Alvarez
Commissioned by Blake Robison and Round House Theatre

CAST OF CHARACTERS: Seven actors

All actors must be bi-lingual or have true proficiency in Spanish.

YOLANDA – The soul and the primary narrative voice of the play, plays 37 down to pre-teen, vivacious, outgoing, rebellious tomboy who has a string of problematic encounters with men, grows from a tentative girl in a new land to an experienced and assimilated woman, has mental breakdown as an adult. A writer. Shades of red and pink.

CARLA – The mind and the oldest sister, plays 39 down to pre-teen, serious, protective, not entirely without humor but reticent to show it, harassed and teased as a youngster. A psychiatrist. Shades of yellow.

SANDRA – The fragile beauty and the second sister, the listener in the family, plays 38 to pre-teen, fragile, the loner of the group, with eating disorders, tends to look at the family from the outside in. Also has mental breakdown as an adult. A college counselor. Shades of blue.

SOFIA – The heart and the youngest sister, wild and rebellious, challenges her father's authority, more sexually open, the only sister without a college degree. Sofia is happily married to a German man. The most assimilated to American culture and the only mother out of the daughters. Shades of white.

PAPI – the patriarch, strong and dignified, loves his girls, has traditional views as to morals and behavior, intolerant of non-Dominican values, a successful doctor who flees the Trujillo dictatorship for political reasons, faces humiliation in bringing the family to New York where he must re-establish his credentials and reputation, plays 55-60.

MAMI – the mother, the child-raiser, the glue of the family unit, fond of aphorisms, protective but supportive of the girls' growth and liberation, comes from a privileged Dominican family but tries hard to become an American mother, plays 45-55. (Also plays TIA CARMEN)

THE OTHER – plays all the family outsiders in the play: boyfriends, husbands, teacher, police, soldier, and the Englishwoman Dona Charito

SETTING: Fluid. The United States and the Dominican Republic

TIME: Fluid, traveling backwards:1990-1958

SCENE I: YOLANDA

("Yolanda" is projected on the screen)

(YOLANDA walks on, carrying a suitcase. The suitcase is perhaps adorned with images of Guavas or something else that is tropical or Dominican. The suitcase is heavy; it is baggage in more than one way. And like so many of us, she sometimes carries the weight of her culture with her no matter where she is.

She arrives at a tree. She looks around...and opens her suitcase and pulls out a tattered red journal and pencil..

She is here to bury the book. She is done with writing. She is blocked. She is a writer that has lost her voice. A woman that has not been able to find her soulmate. A girl who still doesn't know where she belongs.

She suddenly opens it.

A sound or voices from her past lifts off the pages.

She slams the book.

Curious, she opens it again:

Another sound /song from her past blares out of the book.

Excited, she opens it up again.

She hears military drums and then a loud horrible Gunshot,

Terrified, she closes the tattered book again.

Upsur, she pulls her hair and is about to drop the book over the edge

And then she has a spark...the first seed of an idea...

YOLANDA

How the Garcia Girls lost their accents...

And then...

Rumble. .

The air fills with words or music

With the voices in her head, of her past.

Whispering.

Then Louder and Louder,

MAMI, PAPI, HER SISTERS and THE OTHER APPEAR pulling Guava suitcases

YOLANDA begins to write her story.

YOLANDA

Let's start at the end. The Kiss, Michigan, 1989.

SCENE II: THE KISS – MICHIGAN, 1989

(PROJECTED: The Kiss, Michigan 1989)

ALL the sisters arrive with their suitcases. The Tree becomes a New York fire escape.

YOLANDA

In the almost thirty years since we came to the US, every winter, there is one New York tradition we always celebrate. It's more important than Christmas or New Years. More bang than the Fourth of July. Do you know what it is?

GIRLS

Papi's Birthday!

YOLANDA

Yes!

PAPI

The rules are very very simple.

ALL

No boys.

SANDRA

No boyfriends

SOFIA

No husbands

CARLA

No men allowed.

YOLANDA

Just the one, two, three, four of us girls.

PAPI

And Mami.

MAMI

¡Como no claro que sí!

PAPI

Our apartment is too small for everyone.

FIFI

But what if, instead, for Papi's seventieth birthday, we do the party at my house?

CARLA

Fifi wants to make up to Papi.

SANDRA

It's been 3 years.

YOLANDA

How's Michigan?

PAPI

¿Que que?

MAMI

Leave New York?

YOLANDA

It's not happening.

SANDRA

He's not ready yet.

CARLA

He doesn't want to leave New York.

FIFI

(To her sisters) Good God, why does it have to be this hard? You would think he was born and bred Yankees fan. *(To her parents)* Just for the weekend. For Papi's fiesta.

YOLANDA

Sofia, the youngest, the wildest, and adventurous free spirit, now a housewife living in a suburban home in the Midwest.

FIFI

I'll get music...food...the works...for Papi!

YOLANDA

Fifi, who had once so offended Papi with her "loose open ways" that he said something that drove Sofia out of the house forever.

(Otto appears with the baby)

FIFI

Now respectfully married to my German husband Otto, and mother to our brand new baby Boy!

PAPI

A Boy!? Really?

(The celebration begins. Maybe the sister's open their suitcases and pull out balloons and party favors. Cake. A banner with "Happy Birthday" Balloons.)

ALL

A BOY!

(MAMI and PAPI arrive, dragging the suitcases)

CARLA

Papi!

PAPI

My good girl Carla! My beautiful Sandi! Y Yoyo, my poet!

(FIFI is about to greet PAPI, but instead if a hug he asks)

PAPI

Y el nieto? Where is my grandson?

SOFIA *(brings the baby)*

Here he is! Your legacy, Baby Carlos Garcia Schmidt.

PAPI *(holds the baby)*

Named after me

MAMI

Fifi, he's beautiful!

PAPI

You can be president, you were born here!

SOFIA

Hola Papi, welcome to Michigan.

SANDI

Hey, look how happy you made him, Fifi.

SOFIA

(Under her breath to Sandi) He barely said Hi to me.

CARLA *(takes the baby and hands him to FIFI. FIFI exits with the baby)*

Okay Papi! Baby Boy needs to nap,

PAPI

No...

YOLANDA

And it's Present time!

PAPI

(Twinkle in his eye) Ah yes, present time. Here girls.

(Hands them all envelopes with cash)

SANDI

No, our present to you!

CARLA

Papi, you do this every time.

YOLANDA

No, no, it's your birthday after all.

CARLA

Your day!

PAPI

There's plenty more where that came from. What else can I do with it? The revolution in the old country has failed. All my compañeros killed or bought off. It is just us here so what I make is for my girls. Just don't let your men see. They might receive the wrong idea.

FIFI

Here Papi, open our cards.

PAPI

Oh, is this a beautiful poem from Yolanda?

YOLANDA

No, it's not. *(Beat)* I don't write anymore. I teach.

(silence)

MAMI

Lolo, open our present!

PAPI

A gold watch! Mami, Girls Thank you.

SANDI

We should take a picture.

YOLANDA

Let me take it.

FIFI

No I'll take it.

CARLA

We should all be in it.

ALL

Otto!

(OTTO, Sofia's joyful German husband enters with CAKE)

OTTO

Happy Birthday, Papi.!

(He leads everyone in singing HAPPY BIRTHDAY which gets overtaken by a Spanish Feliz CUMPLEANOS)

PAPI

Thank you Otto. For having me here in your home.

OTTO

Mi casa es su casa.

(The family cheers his Germanic Spanish)

SOFIA

(Laughing) Ay Otto! What an accent!

MAMI

He's trying hard to learn the language!

OTTO

Got to make the boss Feliz!

(OTTO warmly hugs and kisses SOFIA)

PAPI

This is wonderful, girls.

YOLANDA

And it's just going to get better!

(The girls cheer as Merengue Music comes on and everyone dances. Mami, Papi, The sisters, then OTTO comes back and dances too.... FIFI and Otto have the best moves...suddenly Papi has no one to dance with. He sits and watches his wife and his girls relish the music, dancing with a younger man. The song ends and the girls laugh and fall down exhausted).

SANDI

Are you OK, Papi?

PAPI

OK. Old. Happy to see you happy, Now, if I don't make it to my 71st ...

YOLANDA

Come on, Papi

PAPI

It could happen...

SOFIA

Not to you.

MAMI

You are healthy!

PAPI

All this work...just to become an old man. All of you...just children.

YOLANDA

Last I checked, Carla was almost eyeing forty

CARLA

Why must writers, I'm sorry, teachers exaggerate all the time?

PAPI

Dancing our lives away.

SANDRA

I never dance. I need to dance more.

PAPI

(Sighs) I paid to straighten your teeth, curl and uncurl your hair, smooth out your accent. And now, I am nothing. A tree without roots. Everyone in this room will survive me.

(That familiar festive family hollow feeling bubbles up)

CARLA

Oh, Papi, you are being silly.

PAPI

You know who I would be if we had been able to stay on the island? El distinguido Doctor Carlos Antonio Garcia. But who am I now? Hispanic Male over sixty five.

SANDI

Ya, Ya Papi. It's going to be OK,

YOLANDA

Let's cheer you up! Play a game!

(BLINDFOLDS PAPI)

PAPI

(Pleased) Not the blindfold game!

GIRLS

Yes! Yes!

CARLA

Are you ready, Papi?

PAPI

I am perfect ready.

CARLA

OK now guess who this is. *(Motions to SANDRA)*

(SANDRA tiptoes and gives him a peck)

PAPI

That was Mami!

ALL

No!

PAPI

Carla?

ALL

(Laughing) NO!

PAPI

YoYo?

ALL

No

PAPI

Sandi!

SANDRA

You guessed it! *(clapping)*

CARLA

Here's another one coming at you.

(CARLA kisses the top of his head).

YOLANDA

Who was that, Papi?

PAPI

That was Mami!

ALL

No!

PAPI

Sandi? Yoyo? Carla?

CARLA

Yes! It's me!

SANDRA

Who's next?

SOFIA

Ooh, it's getting raunchy in here!

(SOFIA kisses his nose)

PAPI

Sandi? Yoyo? Carla?

ALL

NO!

PAPI

Sandi

ALL

No.

(He keeps skipping Fifi's name. As if she doesn't exist. All the girls become aware of the omission.)

PAPI

YoYo?

ALL

No.

PAPI

Carla?

ALL

No.

(PAUSE. Hurt, SOFIA licks her hand and defiantly wipes her palm down Papi's face. SILENCE)

(ALL gasp and adlib reactions)

(PAPI is Furious. He pulls off his blindfold. SOFIA and PAPI face off.)

PAPI

BASTA! How dare you?

FIFI

You ignore me in my own home!

PAPI

I don't ignore you. My whole life is you girls. You girls and your Mother were always my home.

MAMI

Papi. You're tired.

PAPI

I tried so hard to give you a better life here. But...what have I done?

I want to go home right now.!!!

FIFI

I'll call a cab.

(Everyone protests)

PAPI

Let my heart burst in mid air, let me die in the sky. There's nowhere on earth where I want to be buried anymore.

FIFI

I can't believe this.

YOLANDA

Papi, why are you doing this?

PAPI

I don't understand any of you anymore. Carla, you divorced with two husbands, Sandi, you, with none, Sofia, my lost baby married to a German, and you, Yolanda, married then divorced, all alone with a gift for words yet refusing to write. You break my heart.

(Papi exits)

MAMI

I had a wonderful time girls.

(MAMI AND PAPI exit. A door slam. THE GIRLS sit stunned)

YOLANDA

Ay Dios mio...how did we come to this? How did our family end up so blindfolded and blind sighted in a snowy suburban home...

ALL GIRLS

In Michigan?