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Outside the Bones

Lyn Di Iorio
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Lyn Di Iorio's first novel is set in New York and Puerto Rico and combines the exoticism of Afro-Caribbean witchcraft with a love story outside the boundaries of the expected and the ordinary. Fina Mata, a young woman living on Manhattan's Upper West Side, is a practicing *bruja*, or self-described "spirit worker." Fina is loud, outspoken, and newly enamored of Chico, a jazz musician and her upstairs neighbor.

Chico's music transports Fina to unprecedented heights on the dance floor, as described in her jumpy, electric voice: "A man whose face I barely saw grabbed hold of my waist and spun me into the sea of dancers. The music lassoed me out of my fat girl avatar and into sweaty J. Lo turns against my faceless partner's jeans. I danced to a solo sharp as the blue of the skies over El Combate beach, and then one where I was falling, falling, falling into the black water of the Puerto Rico trench. I finally noticed that the thin guy was slapping my butt after every turn, and trying to lick my lovebirds. Worse: he had a pizza face, so I skipped to the ladies room."

The problem is, there are rivals for Chico's affections. One is Hilesca, who claims to be his long-lost daughter ("With her ivory-white skin, eyes like melted black wax, werewolf eyebrows and little rosebud mouth, she was an ugly version of Betty Boop"). Chico's ex-lover, a former Miss Universe, also poses a threat to Fina's love-struck intentions.

So she resorts first to putting a spell—or *fufu*—on him. When the results fail to meet her desires, Fina makes a pilgrimage to Spanish Harlem and the home of Tata Victor Tumba Fuego, "Master of Fire." Her initiation into *palo monte,* the dark art of communing with the spirits of the dead, leads to unintended consequences reaching far beyond anything Fina can control.

A native of Puerto Rico, Lyn Di Iorio attended Harvard University and now teaches literature and creative writing at The City College of New York. She has written scholarly books on Latino literature, but in *Outside the Bones,* she lets fly with a brash and impulsive voice that never lets up. The sheer energy of the narrative perfectly matches Fina's passionate spirit. This novel will resonate with fans of Oscar Hijuelos' *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* and *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Diaz.
LEE POLEVOI (November 17, 2011)

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