

# The Poet Upstairs



**By Judith Ortiz Cofer**

**Illustrations by Oscar Ortiz**



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Summary: When a poet moves into the apartment above hers, young Juliana asks to meet her and together they write poems of tropical birds and a river that flows to the sea, typing out words that change the world, if only for a while.

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**“y mi niñez fue toda un poema en el río,  
y un río en el poema de mis primeros sueños.”**

**—*El Río Grande de Loiza*, Julia De Burgos**

This book is for my grandson, Elias John, and with love and gratitude to his parents, Tanya and Dory, who read to Eli every day.

As always, I want to thank John Cofer for his constant encouragement of my work.

*Mil gracias* to my *compañeras* Billie Bennett Franchini, Kathryn Locey and Erin Christian who offered their comments and expertise as this book evolved over time, until it came to fruition.

—JOC



To my dear wife Wina and my beautiful children Oscar-Giovanni and Nitshell. Your unconditional love and patience keeps my universe together. *Los amo.*

—OO





One day, a poet moved into the apartment upstairs in the building where a little girl lived with her mother. The girl, Juliana, was too sick to go to her first day of school. Her bed faced the window so she could see the street.

“Who’s the lady with all the books, Mami?” she asked her mother, who was getting ready to go to work. Her mother was a nurse for the old people in their building.

“I heard that she’s a famous poet, that she lived on an island, like me,” Mami answered.

They watched the poet, a tall lady in a red coat and red hat, carry boxes of books and papers from a car. They heard her going up and down the stairs.

“A writer?” Juliana was excited when she heard this. She loved books, and her mother read to her in both Spanish and English.

“I heard that she’s writing a book, *hija*. We must not bother her.” But seeing her daughter’s look of disappointment, she added, “Maybe we’ll meet her. But first, you have to get better.”



