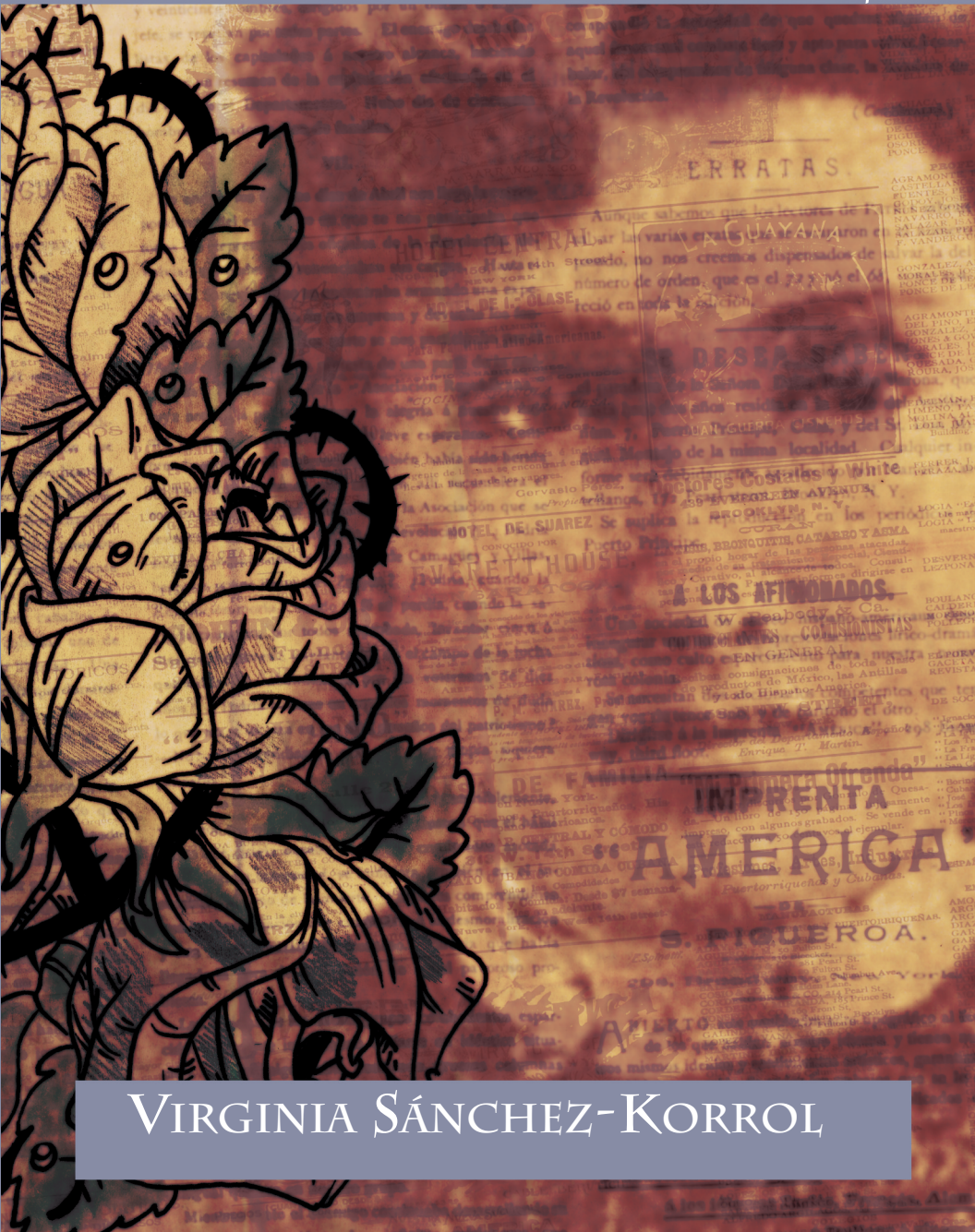


THE SEASON OF REBELS^{AND} ROSES



VIRGINIA SÁNCHEZ-KORROL

THE SEASON OF REBELS^{AND} ROSES

VIRGINIA SÁNCHEZ-KORROL



PIÑATA BOOKS
ARTE PÚBLICO PRESS
HOUSTON, TEXAS

The Season of Rebels and Roses is made possible through a grant from the City of Houston through the Houston Arts Alliance. We are grateful for their support.

Piñata Books are full of surprises!

Piñata Books
An imprint of
Arte Público Press
University of Houston
4902 Gulf Fwy, Bldg 19, Rm 100
Houston, Texas 77204-2004

Cover design by Victoria Castillo

Names: Sánchez Korrol, Virginia, author.

Title: The season of rebels and roses / by Virginia Sanchez-Korrol.

Description: Houston, TX : Piñata Books, an imprint of Arte Público Press, [2018] | Summary: In 1887, Inocencia, eighteen, horrifies her parents when they learn she wants to marry and work with Sotero Figueroa, a mulatto journalist and independence movement activist in Puerto Rico.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017061348 (print) | LCCN 2018008027 (ebook) | ISBN 9781518505027 (epub) | ISBN 9781518505034 (kindle) | ISBN 9781518505041 (pdf) | ISBN 9781558858657 (alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Puerto Rico—History—To 1898--Juvenile fiction. | Figueroa, Sotero—Juvenile fiction. | CYAC: Puerto Rico—History—To 1898—Fiction. | Figueroa, Sotero—Fiction. | Political activists—Fiction. | Journalists—Fiction. | Clubs—Fiction. | Racially mixed people—Fiction. | Social classes—Fiction.

Classification: LCC PZ7.S1949 (ebook) | LCC PZ7.S1949 Se 2018 (print) | DDC [Fic]—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017061348>

©The paper used in this publication meets the requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

The Season of Rebels and Roses © 2018 by Virginia Sánchez-Korrol

Printed in the United States of America
Cushing-Malloy, Inc., Ann Arbor, MI
May 2018–June 2018
5 4 3 2 1

For **Aura**
who loves Inocencia
and
Ramón
who has her courage.

This is a work of fiction based on historical facts, referred to in the Timeline of Events, 1815–1899 in this book. Historical figures, characters, dialogues, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My interpretation of Inocencia Martínez Figueroa's life in New York City and her friendship with the esteemed poet, Lola Rodríguez de Tió, has many godparents. Without their support this book could not have been written. I am forever in their debt.

Aura Garfunkel, Asunción Lavrin, Olga Wagenheim, Juan González, Lauren Korrol and Anelisa Garfunkel generously offered critical insights. Their expertise helped me flesh out the characters within their historical moments. Alberto Hernández shared his research from Cuba, including the issues of the newspaper, *Patria*, New York City directories and the vast resources of the Library and Archives of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College. Edna Acosta-Belen and the team of researchers at the Center produced the Puerto Rican Heritage Poster Series and the Study Guides. These materials formed the framework on which I crafted my story.

My colleagues at Brooklyn College, Karel Rose, Antonio Nadal and Carlos A. Cruz broadened my understanding of literary styles, as did Elena Dodd's comments of a first draft. The Piermont writers, Carole Weaver-Linser, Lisa Coughlin, Beryl Myers, AnnE Miller, and Edith Knoblick, led by novelist, Jeanine Cummins, challenged my narrative until all their questions were answered.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Gabriela Baeza Ventura, Marina Tristán and the team at Arte Público Press for their continuous support in producing the finished product. And to Nicolás Kanellos, scholar and meticulous editor, I hope this book stands as testimony to your stalwart dedication to recover and tell our stories.

My personal support team are the loves of my life. Chuck, Lauren and Pam suffered endless conversations about this book and other projects, but still continued to support me to the finish. Without them, nothing in my life is possible.

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| Acknowledgements | v |
| <i>The Season of Rebels and Roses</i> | 1 |
| Part I | 2 |
| Part II | 65 |
| Part III | 141 |
| Part IV | 183 |
| Afterword | 232 |
| Timeline of Events | 239 |
| Reading Guide | 243 |
| Glossary of Terms and Phrases | 245 |
| Sources | 247 |
| Author's Bio | 248 |

PART I

1

PONCE, 1873

Not one of them had fallen to the ground—not even one.

The child gawked at the branches of the trees, her skinny legs folded beneath her on the hot prickly ground. *Quenepas*, the tree's olive-size fruit growing in bunches like grapes, stubbornly clung to their branches in the same place she'd seen them that morning. Not one round fruit was on the ground.

"Mira, Inocencia, it's time to harvest the *quenepas*," Papá had said to her the day before. "They're more abundant this year than last." Instantly, the seven-year-old's mouth had watered. She could hardly wait to taste the sweet slick pulp she knew lay hidden inside the leathery shell.

"Hmmm," she now waited, growing tired of wishing the fruit would fall. She studied the tree's solid trunk, offshoots and jagged bark mentally separating sturdy branches from shaky limbs. *What if* . . . In a flash, her eyes lit up. She kicked off her shoes and rolled off her long stockings, crumpling them into balls. Taking a sudden leap, Inocencia rushed towards the tree. She gripped the craggy footholds with bare toes, thrusting her arms up to catch a low branch, then swung her leg right over it. Her fingertips could barely brush the fruit. She grasped the branch tightly between her

thighs and shimmied up the limb, extending her arms way up as high as she could reach.

Suddenly, she landed flat on the ground, a scrunching sound coming from her left ankle.

“Ouch, ouch, ouch,” she cried, cradling the ankle with both hands.

Hearing the girl’s yelps, Don Pedro, the stablekeeper, rushed to her side. “Ay, ay, *nenita*,” he murmured, showing the soft heart he’d always had for the plain, unruly girl. As she was helped to her feet, Inocencia spied a bunch of *quenepas* lying on the ground beside her. *I did that! I brought them down*, she told herself between sobs. That day, Inocencia learned that if you wanted something badly enough, you had to go for it with all your might.



She was eighteen when she attended her first public lecture. The topic was the 1868 Lares revolt for independence from Spain, and one fiery speaker, in particular, caught her complete attention. His words boomed with a passion for justice that inspired the impressionable girl. Her pulse began to race so fast that she found it difficult to remain still, not to jump to her feet and voice her approval.

The charismatic speaker was the mulatto journalist, Sotero Figueroa. His rousing calls for freedom from colonial repression, for an independent Puerto Rico, enthralled the audience. Inocencia’s mind soared, taking intellectual leaps she’d never known before. She was excited to join in the movement, to bring about this liberation he spoke of. All of those things she wanted with an urgency she didn’t quite understand. And she wanted this man, too, in ways she hadn’t expected.

For a second she thought of her family. Like others in Ponce’s white society, they believed that even a hint of

African blood polluted family trees. *But I'll get around that.* That's when she realized she'd crossed a forbidden social boundary. *I'm destined for an exciting, challenging future,* she promised herself, jutting her square chin forward in mock defiance.

Shortly thereafter, Inocencia joined Doña Lola's women's group.

"An educated mother knows enough to educate her children," Lola would say, going against the grain of popular belief that women would use book learning to write love letters to their lovers instead of improving their minds.

Like Inocencia, the others in the group were daughters of small landowners or bureaucrats. Each one yearned to expand her own horizon. They spoke of women's rights, read essays—some written by Doña Lola, herself—and devised strategies for social change. They signed petitions and joined protests. That's how Inocencia began to believe in women's rights and freeing her people and crossing society's color line.