

EARTHQUAKE CHIÇA

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BROADWAY PLAY PUBLISHING INC

224 E 62nd St, NY NY 10065-8201

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BroadwayPlayPubl.com

EARTHQUAKE CHICA
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First printing: December 2007
Second printing: March 2009
I S B N: 0-88145-361-7

Book design: Marie Donovan
Word processing: Microsoft Word
Typographic controls: Ventura Publisher
Typeface: Palatino
Printed and bound in the U S A

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anne García-Romero's plays include SANTA CONCEPCIÓN, MARY PEABODY IN CUBA, JUANITA'S STATUE and DESERT LONGING. Her plays have been developed and produced most notably at the New York Shakespeare Festival/Public Theater, Arielle Tepper Productions' Summer Play Festival (*Off-Broadway*), The Mark Taper Forum, Hartford Stage, Borderlands Theater and South Coast Repertory. She has received commissions from the Public Theater, The Mark Taper Forum and South Coast Repertory. She has also written for Peninsula Films, Elysian Films and Disney Creative Entertainment. She's been a Jerome Fellow at the Playwrights Center of Minneapolis as well as a MacDowell Colony fellow. She's taught at Cal Arts, U C Santa Barbara, U C Riverside, Wesleyan University and Macalester College. She holds an MFA in Playwriting from the Yale School of Drama and is an alumna of New Dramatists.

EARTHQUAKE CHICA was commissioned by the Center Theater Group/Mark Taper Forum Latino Theater Initiative, Gordon Davidson, Artistic Director/Producer. The play was given readings at the 2001 Center Theater Group/Mark Taper Forum Latino Theater Initiative's Writers Retreat, the 2002 A S K Theater Projects Stage One series and at New Dramatists. It received a finalist prize for the 2002 National Latino Playwrights Award at the Arizona Theater Company.

EARTHQUAKE CHICA was originally presented Off-Broadway on 20 July 2004 at S P F-04 (Arielle Tepper, Founder) with the following cast and creative contributors:

ESMERALDA Camillia Sanes
SAM Paolo Andino
Director Leah C Gardiner
Set design Cameron Anderson
Costume design Emilio Sosa
Lighting design Lucrecia Briseo

EARTHQUAKE CHICA received its world premiere on 7 June 2007 at Borderlands Theater, (Barclay Goldsmith, Producing Director) with the following cast:

ESMERALDA Alida Gunn

SAM Joe Quintero

Director Eva Zorilla Tessler

Set & lighting design Russell Stagg

Costume design Elizabeth Blair

Sound design Jim Klingenfus

CHARACTERS & SETTING

ESMERALDA PORTILLO, *thirties, a secretary*
SAM REYES, *thirties, an accountant*

Present. Los Angeles. An office in a downtown high-rise and various city locations.

Note: On pages 17, 46, & 66, quotes are from *Oda al diccionario* from *Las Odas* by Pablo Neruda. On pages 17 & 54, quotes are from *Luna y panorama de los insectos* and *Tu infancia en Menton* from *Poeta en Nueva York* by Federico García Lorca. On page 17, quote is from *Las ruinas circulares* from *Ficciones* by Jorge Luis Borges.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to: Susan Gurman, Luis Alfaro, Diane Rodriguez, Arielle Tepper and S P F, Barclay Goldsmith and Borderlands Theater, Elaine Romero and Arizona Theatre Company, Leah C Gardiner, Eva Zorilla Tessler, Camillia Sanes, Jonathan Del Arco, Paolo Andino, Alida Gunn, Joe Quintero, Todd London and New Dramatists, Elizabeth and Dan Anderson, Ellen Clarke, Barbara, Alicia, Toño and Mercedes García-Romero, Paul Fariello and to the spirit of José Antonio García-Romero whose singular artistic passion prepared the way.

for Alicia

ACT ONE

Scene One

(Lights rise on ESMERALDA and SAM at an evening law firm Christmas party in a downtown high-rise.)

ESMERALDA: Earthquake. *(With Anglo accent)* Terremoto. My father called me that. I'm not an earthquake, alright? I'm a force of nature, though. Watch me move. *(She does a sexy dance move.)*

SAM: You're not an earthquake.

ESMERALDA: Then what am I?

SAM: A force of nature?

ESMERALDA: What kind?

(She does another sexy dance move. She blows him a kiss.)

SAM: Windstorm? *(She does another sexy dance move. She licks her lips.)*

SAM: Rainfall?

(She does another sexy dance move. She sucks on her finger.)

SAM: A tidal wave?

(She stops dancing.)

ESMERALDA: I'm not a tidal wave.

SAM: Not a tidal wave...I mean like you create waves...fantastic waves...like the kind that surfers ride and revel in because they're awesome surfers.

ESMERALDA: Drop it, Mister Accountant-Numbers Boy.

SAM: Sam.

ESMERALDA: I know your name. Don't worry, little Sammy. I catch the drift. So what's up with the slick hair, huh? Got a little spiffed up for ye old (*With over emphasized Anglo accent*) *fiesta de navidad*?

SAM: You speak the language? Me too.

ESMERALDA: Nope. Before my dad died two months ago, his Latin face would erupt in anger, turn the color of bricks while he screamed at me, (*With Anglo accent*) "*Terremoto. Terremoto.*"

SAM: I'm sorry. My condolences.

ESMERALDA: You think I'd speak the language after that?

SAM: I...I don't know.

ESMERALDA: Yeah. Whatever. So what do ya' do to have fun, soldier? Are ya' kinky? Huh? Huh? Oh come on, I know your type. The silent numbers cruncher. You sit in this damn office all day long and you crunch, crunch, crunch, until your little fingers go numb and then you go home and put on your leather and hit the bars.

SAM: I uh...read...novels and poetry. Do math.

ESMERALDA: I said fun, soldier.

SAM: I uh...like devour Latin American literature and work on math equations in my spare time...algebra mostly.

ESMERALDA: But you do like leather, don't you?

SAM: Depends on what kind.

ESMERALDA: Now we're talkin'.

SAM: Leather bound editions of my favorite novels, sure. But the kind of leather you're talking about... I don't think so.

ESMERALDA: Come on, you'd look so hot in some chaps, a harness...with a fine black cap on your head. Oh yeah.

(She musses his hair.)

SAM: You have nice hands.

ESMERALDA: You have a nice ass.

SAM: I do? Okay...um...but you...whenever you place your boss' time sheets in my in-box I notice how long and slender and delicate your fingers are.

ESMERALDA: Do you always wear your hair like that? It would look so much cuter if you did it like this. *(She plays with his hair.)* There. Much better. *(Beat)* Do you get wasted on a regular basis because I don't. I can't. I joined one of those programs a few years ago but like I don't go anymore because I can't stand the people at those meetings and all their annoying lingo, but I know I can't drink. My body can't handle it.

SAM: I don't drink much. Only when I'm nervous.

ESMERALDA: What're you nervous about?

(SAM looks away nervously.)

ESMERALDA: Me? ...The lowly worm secretary on the totem pole here?

SAM: But see you're fantastic because you don't care. You willingly buck the dress code and you talk loudly to the secretaries and the lawyers. You don't seem to care much about what people think at all.

ESMERALDA: Okay, and you've had how much to drink?

SAM: Would you wanna...I mean...maybe we could, you know, have lunch together...sometime?

ESMERALDA: Oh please. You crunch numbers. I can barely type. It would never work.

SAM: Look, if you don't wanna get together during the week, maybe on a weekend day, we could you know, meet up for coffee or something.

ESMERALDA: You're too normal.

SAM: I could teach you some Spanish.

ESMERALDA: I tried. Didn't work. My father called me earthquake *chica*.

SAM: Alright then...uh...

ESMERALDA: "You are earthquake *chica*." He began to speak in Spanglish toward the end of his unhappy life.

SAM: Well...so...Merry Christmas. *Feliz Navidad y Prospero Año Nuevo.* (He starts to walk away.)

ESMERALDA: One time I saw this gypsy singer at this concert...she was like wailing in Spanish and I just burst into tears, spontaneously. But I just kinda don't fit in. Got it?

(SAM stops.)

SAM: The language is inside of you, Esmeralda.

ESMERALDA: He even knows my name. You're a persistent little fella, aren't ya? This fiesta is so done. I'm outta here.

SAM: So are you gonna avoid me now that we've talked, like this?

ESMERALDA: Oh yeah, like I'm gonna run away screaming every time I see your face because you asked me out and I rejected you.

SAM: Whatever. I mean I've crossed that line from professional to personal.

ESMERALDA: Listen, pal, lines don't exist with me. I'm not a lines kinda gal. Got it? So I won't avoid you. I will talk to you. I just won't go out with you.

(Lights shift.)

Scene Two

(Later that night. Lights rise on ESMERALDA and SAM sitting on top of her bed, fully clothed.)

SAM: Last night I dreamt I was walking through an abandoned house and *un viejito* a little old man gave me a dusty book. He had long white hair and a leather-lined face and he pointed for me to take the book outside. So I opened up a door and I left the sepia-toned interior for a technicolor field and sitting in the field was this girl-woman-*señorita* far off in the distance. And I had *ese libro* this book and I started running and screaming and yelling and this *señorita* had her back to me and when I approached her, out of breath, I gave her the red-leather bound volume and she turned around and she had your face but she was a different you. *Diferente* than what I had known. And she-you took the book and I sat down next to you-her in silence as we read and the wind picked up gently. *(Beat)* Do you remember your dreams?

ESMERALDA: You don't get out much, do you?

SAM: I dated this girl once, Carina, who kept a bucket by her bed. I asked, "So what's with the bucket? Drip in the ceiling? You sick?" I mean, you know, it was the standard blue plastic kind. And she answers, "It's for my tears. I collect them. Don't make me collect more, alright?" I mean, try sleeping in a bed with a bucket of tears next to you.

ESMERALDA: The last guy I was with for like two weeks...Hector...he used to keep a large bone next to his bed. He called it, "My beautiful *hueso*"

SAM: What kind of bone?

ESMERALDA: Like a medium size arm bone. In a glass case by his bed. He said it reminded him of the essence of life. Said it was supposed to be like this ancient Aztec relic or some shit that he bought at a swap meet. Said it reminded him of where we all end up. Do you know how hard it is to sleep in a bed with a man, when there is an ancient bone staring at you? It's like the bone had eyes. I'd wake up in the middle of the night and want to break it out of the glass box and toss it out the window. It's like dead spirits were invading the bed. But I figured he'd be pissed. So I didn't.

SAM: Smart move.

ESMERALDA: So last night I'm lying in this bed and I'm thinking over the string of men in my life, you know.

SAM: A long string?

ESMERALDA: We're talking football field. And it's like there seems to be this pattern starting with nice, not-so-nice then never-nice-at-all. Some stay nicer longer. But most end up in the last category sooner or later.

SAM: You know, if it were me, I wouldn't end up in the last category. Not that category consideration is even issue for me, mind you. (*Beat*) Do you worry about mud? In the office?

ESMERALDA: Mud in the office?

SAM: Because I won't carry it in my pocket and sling handfuls into unsuspecting secretaries' ears.

ESMERALDA: Sling mud? I think you mean dish dirt. Like gossip. God, my dad would always mess up sayings like that.

SAM: I won't.

ESMERALDA: I appreciate that. Not that I care what anyone thinks but you know, it can complicate things at work and make people all petty and strange.

SAM: Because I see things in you, Esmeralda. I see beneath the outer shell that keeps the deeper you submerged in water or blood or sugar or fog. It's the seeing you don't like. Which is fine. But let it be known that I do see.

ESMERALDA: I can't be with anyone right now. That's why there's a part of me that thinks I shouldn't even have asked you over to my place because I don't want you to think the wrong thing.

SAM: I won't think the wrong thing. I don't even like wrong things.

ESMERALDA: I mean in the past I would've brought you home and seduced you and shit but I'm not into that anymore. You know?

SAM: Right. Of course not.

ESMERALDA: Most people don't get me. On a good day, my sister might. My mother? Not really. And on a bad day. Forget it. No one. Zip. But you listen to me and see things in me like you say. And I like that.

SAM: My family doesn't seem to get me either. I mean my mom can't even accept the fact that I'm a grown man. She wants me to always stay her little Samuelito.

(ESMERALDA *sighs*.)

ESMERALDA: My mom lives upstairs. I moved back here after my dad got sick.

SAM: I'm sorry.

ESMERALDA: Lungs. He was sick for a few years but the end came quick.

SAM: I'm so sorry.

ESMERALDA: My mom does this secretary shit for a living too. Full time. She used to be a Spanish professor but then when dad got sick she lost her teaching job, couldn't find a new one so she had to go work in an office to support him.

SAM: Does she miss the teaching?

ESMERALDA: She says she doesn't but I don't know how she can't. And my sister is like this physicist who went to Berkeley or was it Stanford. I can never remember. She didn't get caught up in this exhausting crap.

SAM: She must be pretty smart.

ESMERALDA: So am I. I mean I can do more than organizing my boss' mountain of paper into neat piles of folders, redwells and Pendaflex files.

SAM: On my lunch breaks, I research poetic connections in algebra. I think equations can be very metaphorical. And I inhale literature. Numbers and language fill my brain. (*Beat*) I'm sorry about your father...and mother. She taught around here?

ESMERALDA: U C L A. My dad was an artist. She taught. He painted. And he'd always rant to her, "You're the teacher. Why don't you teach your daughters to speak the language" And I was like, "Well, Dad, you're the one from Mexico."

SAM: Sorry for speaking in front of you.

ESMERALDA: He didn't like me or anyone else challenging him like that. One challenge and then like volcanic eruptions. So I never learned the language. I didn't wanna be any thing like him. Didn't wanna be someone who uses words like weapons.

SAM: Sometimes my Spanish words just slip out... but never as like grenades, or anything.

ACT ONE

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ESMERALDA: So I picked up the bad sayings, a few choice good ones but that's it.

SAM: That's a start.

ESMERALDA: I mean my sister is fluent. She travels to Guadalajara all the time to visit all our aunts, uncles, cousins.... (*Beat*) Hey, do you wanna hear my animal imitations? I do a mean poodle. Or do you wanna watch one of my dances? My hips...baby...my hips.

SAM: It's almost one. I better go.

ESMERALDA: I like how you can hear my thoughts, Samuel.

SAM: Cool. So...uh...do you like museums? You know... the Getty? They're having this outdoor concert thing on Saturday.

ESMERALDA: Look. It's not like I don't like hanging with you but I think you need to go out and meet a nice normal girl.

SAM: Fine. Whatever. Forget it.

(*Lights shift.*)