



# **WATER BY THE SPOONFUL**

**BY QUIARA ALEGRÍA HUDES**



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WATER BY THE SPOONFUL was originally commissioned by Hartford Stage  
Michael Wilson, Artistic Director                      Michael Stotts, Managing Director  
Through the AETNA New Voices Fellowship Program

World Premiere Production  
Presented by  
Hartford Stage  
October 28, 2011

Darko Tresnjak, Artistic Director                      Michael Stotts, Managing Director

New York Premiere Produced by Second Stage Theatre, New York, 2013  
Carole Rothman, Artistic Director

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*For Ray Beauchamp*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This play, its story, and its characters are works of fiction. However, I owe a debt of gratitude to Othet Sauris and Elliot Ruiz, whom I interviewed before writing. Without their generosity of story and spirit, my imagination would not have landed at this play.

More seeds of inspiration came from interviews with Jeremy Cohen, Sandy Moehle, Rik Albani, and Alan Leshner. Roger Zepernick, my dear friend, contributed to Scene 10 by sending me a transcript of a speech he gave in Philadelphia along with his permission to adapt it.

Gratitude to all my family, with a special beam of light shining on my mother, Virginia Sanchez. Linda Hudes, Eugenia Burgos, and Liz Morales provide ongoing support and inspiration. My siblings keep me young at heart: Gabriela Sanchez, Ariel Hudes and Forrest Hudes. My stepfather, Mercedes Sanchez, told me a tale of his first cold drink. My father, Henry Hudes, sanded the curly maple of my writing desk.

Gratitude to my collaborators. John Buzzetti, your joy is infectious. Michael Wilson, what a champion you are. Davis McCallum, Armando Riesco, and Zabryna Guevara — what shall we call our theater company? Hana Sharif and Darko Tresnjak, for steel-beam support at Hartford Stage. Catherine Rush, for drawing the starting line, and Kent Gash, for grabbing the baton along the way. New Dramatists, for seven years of safe space.

Gratitude, ongoing, to Paula Vogel.

Gratitude, endless, to Ray.

WATER BY THE SPOONFUL was originally commissioned and produced by Hartford Stage (Michael Wilson, Artistic Director (outgoing); Darko Tresnjak, Artistic Director (incoming); Michael Stotts, Managing Director) in Hartford, Connecticut, opening on October 26, 2011. It was directed by Davis McCallum; the set design was by Neil Patel; the costume design was by Chloe Chapin; the lighting design was by Russell H. Champa; the sound design was by Bray Poor; the original music was by J. Michael Friedman; the production stage manager was Megan Schwarz Dickert; and the production manager was Bryan T. Holcombe. The cast was as follows:

ELLIOT ..... Armando Riesco  
 ODESSA ..... Liza Colón-Zayas  
 YAZMIN ..... Zabryna Guevara  
 CHUTES&LADDERS ..... Ray Anthony  
 FOUNTAINHEAD ..... Matthew Boston  
 PROFESSOR AMAN/GHOST ..... Demosthenes Chrysan  
 ORANGUTAN ..... Teresa Avia Lim

WATER BY THE SPOONFUL received its New York premiere at Second Stage Theatre (Carole Rothman, Artistic Director; Casey Reitz, Executive Director) in December 2012. It was directed by Davis McCallum; the set design was by Neil Patel; the costume design was by Esosa; the lighting design was by Russell H. Champa; the sound design was by Joshua Schmidt; the projection design was by Aaron Rhyne; the fight director was Thomas Schall; the production stage manager was Roy Harris; the stage manager was Trisha Henson; and the production manager was Jeff Wild. The cast was as follows:

ELLIOT ..... Armando Riesco  
 ODESSA ..... Liza Colón-Zayas  
 YAZMIN ..... Zabryna Guevara  
 CHUTES&LADDERS ..... Ray Anthony  
 FOUNTAINHEAD ..... Bill Heck  
 POLICEMAN/PROFESSOR AMAN/GHOST ... Ryan Shams  
 ORANGUTAN ..... Sue Jean Kim

## **CHARACTERS**

ODESSA ORTIZ, 39, a.k.a. Haikumom, founder of [www.recovertogether.com](http://www.recovertogether.com), works odd janitorial jobs, lives one notch above squalor.

ELLIOT ORTIZ, 24, an Iraq vet with a slight limp, works at Subway Hoagies, scores an occasional job as a model or actor, Yazmin's cousin, Odessa's birth son.

YAZMIN ORTIZ, 31, adjunct professor of music, Odessa's niece and Elliot's cousin.

FOUNTAINHEAD, 38, a.k.a. John, a computer programmer and entrepreneur, lives on Philadelphia's Main Line, white.

CHUTES&LADDERS, 56, lives in San Diego, has worked a low-level job at the IRS since the Reagan years, African-American, his real name is Clayton "Buddy" Wilkie.

ORANGUTAN, 31, a recent community college graduate, Japanese by birth, her real name is Madeleine Mays and before that Yoshiko Sakai.

A GHOST, also plays PROFESSOR AMAN, an Arabic professor at Swarthmore; also plays A POLICEMAN in Japan.

## **TIME**

2009. Six years after Elliot left for Iraq.

## **PLACE**

Philadelphia, San Diego, Japan, and Puerto Rico.

## SET

The stage has two worlds. The “real world” is populated with chairs. The chairs are from many locations — living rooms, an office, a seminar room, a church, a diner, internet cafes. They all have the worn-in feel of life. A duct-taped La-Z-Boy. Salvaged trash chairs. A busted-up metal folding chair from a rec center. An Aero chair. An Eames chair. A chair/desk from a college classroom. Diner chairs. A chair from an internet café in Japan. Living room chairs. Library chairs. A church pew. Facing in all different directions.

The “online world” is an empty space. A space that connects the chairs.

## MUSIC

Jazz. Sublime stuff like John Coltrane’s *A Love Supreme*. And noise, like his later *Ascension* or other free jazz.

## NOTE

Unless specifically noted, when characters are online, don’t have actors typing on a keyboard. Treat it like regular conversation rather than the act of writing or typing. They can be doing things people do in the comfort of their home like eating potato chips, walking around in jammies, cooking, doing dishes, clipping nails, etc.

# WATER BY THE SPOONFUL

## Scene 1

*Swarthmore College. Elliot and Yaz eat breakfast. Elliot wears a Subway Hoagies polo shirt.*

ELLIOT. This guy ain't coming. How do you know him?

YAZ. We're on a committee together.

ELLIOT. My shift starts in fifteen.

YAZ. Alright, we'll go.

ELLIOT. Five more minutes. Tonight on the way home, we gotta stop by Whole Foods.

YAZ. Sure, I need toothpaste.

ELLIOT. Yaz, you gotta help me with my mom.

YAZ. You said she had a good morning.

ELLIOT. She cooked breakfast.

YAZ. Progress.

ELLIOT. No. The docs said she can't be eating all that junk, it'll mess with her chemo, so she crawls out of bed for the first time in days and cooks eggs for breakfast. In two inches of pork chop fat. I'm like, Mom, recycle glass and plastic, not grease. She thinks putting the egg on top of a paper towel after you cook it makes it healthy. I told her, Mom, you gotta cook egg whites. In Pam spray. But it has to be her way. Like, "That's how we ate them in Puerto Rico and we turned out fine." You gotta talk to her. I'm trying to teach her about quinoa. Broccoli rabe. Healthy shit. So I get home the other day, she had made quinoa with bacon. She was like, "It's healthy!"

YAZ. That's Ginny. The more stubborn she's being, the better she's feeling.



ELLIOT. I gave those eggs to the dogs when she went to the bathroom. (*She pulls some papers from her purse.*)

YAZ. You wanna be my witness?

ELLIOT. To what? (*Yaz signs the papers.*)

YAZ. My now-legal failure. I'm divorced.

ELLIOT. Yaz. I don't want to hear that.

YAZ. You've been saying that for months and I've been keeping my mouth closed. I just need a John Hancock.

ELLIOT. What happened to "trial separation"?

YAZ. There was a verdict. William fell out of love with me.

ELLIOT. I've never seen you two argue.

YAZ. We did, we just had smiles on our faces.

ELLIOT. That's bullshit. You don't divorce someone before you even have a fight with them. I'm calling him.

YAZ. Go ahead.

ELLIOT. He was just texting me about going to the Phillies game on Sunday.

YAZ. So, go. He didn't fall out of love with the family, just me.

ELLIOT. I'm going to ask him who he's been screwing behind your back.

YAZ. No one, Elliot.

ELLIOT. You were tappin' some extra on the side?

YAZ. He woke up one day and I was the same as any other person passing by on the street, and life is short, and you can only live in mediocrity so long.

ELLIOT. You two are the dog and the owner that look like each other. Y'all are *The Cosby Show*. Conundrum, Yaz and William make a funny, end of episode. You show all us cousins, maybe we can't ever do it ourselves, but it is possible.

YAZ. Did I ever say, "It's possible"?

ELLIOT. By example.

YAZ. Did I ever say those words? (*Professor Aman enters.*)

AMAN. Yazmin, forgive me. You must be ...

ELLIOT. Elliot Ortiz. Nice to meet you, I appreciate it.

AMAN. Professor Aman. (*They shake.*) We'll have to make this short and sweet, my lecture begins ... began ... well, talk fast.

ELLIOT. Yaz, give us a second?

YAZ. I'll be in the car. (*Exits.*)

ELLIOT. I'm late, too, so ...

AMAN. You need something translated.

# WATER BY THE SPOONFUL

by Quiara Alegría Hudes

WINNER OF THE 2012 PULITZER PRIZE

4M, 3W

Somewhere in Philadelphia, Elliot has returned from Iraq and is struggling to find his place in the world. Somewhere in a chat room, recovering addicts keep each other alive, hour by hour, day by day. The boundaries of family and community are stretched across continents and cyberspace as birth families splinter and online families collide. *WATER BY THE SPOONFUL* is a heartfelt meditation on lives on the brink of redemption.

*"A complete and satisfying work ... A quartet of wounded yet fiercely bright characters who are trying to stay sober communicate over the internet. Those who feel the web is a cold connection may change their opinion after they see the very hot limbo in which these characters live and interact ... This is a very funny, warm, and, yes, uplifting play with characters that are vivid, vital, and who stay with you long after the play is over."*

—The Hartford Courant

*"Quiara Alegría Hudes is a blazing talent ... Her new play, WATER BY THE SPOONFUL, blazes with promise. Non-linear and fascinating, it is not easily followed but definitely worthy of both close attention and ultimate praise ... Provocative and brimming with life."*

—Talkin' Broadway

*"All the characters in Quiara Alegría Hudes' compassionate follow-up to Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue (a Pulitzer finalist) are seeking a kind of visa — one that will allow them to make it to a safe haven in a messed-up world. Everyone in the play is living day to day — or spoonful by spoonful, to echo Hudes' poignant metaphor — enabled, hindered, and supported by an ever-interrelated reach of family and friends. The play is a combination poem, prayer and app on how to cope in an age of uncertainty, speed and chaos. When cyber meets the real world, anger gives way to forgiveness and resistance becomes redemption; the heart of the play opens up and the waters flow freely."*

—Variety

Also by Quiara Alegría Hudes

26 MILES

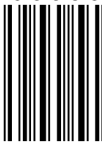
ELLIOT, A SOLDIER'S FUGUE

YEMAYA'S BELLY

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