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Dramatic Publishing

THE BOILER ROOM

by
REUBEN GONZALEZ



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(THE BOILER ROOM)

Cover design by Susan Carle. Cover photo by Peter Krupenye.
Used by permission. The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre
New York production, featuring Miriam Conlon (Olga)
and Joe Quintero (Anthony).

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THE BOILER ROOM

A Play in Two Acts

For one man, two women and one teen-age boy

CHARACTERS

OLGA a 40-50 year old woman
ANTHONY her son, mid to late teens
OLIVIA her daughter, 20-25
DOUG Olivia's husband, early 30s

Playwright's Note:

Anthony should never be cast "older." He is really just a kid who watches cartoons and is trying to live up to the role of "the man of the house." He is not, by any means, a hardcore gang-banger or anything resembling such. He is a kid "on the fence," a kid who can still be saved. To cast this role either too old or too tough would be a major detriment to the meaning of the play.

SETTING: A large boiler room in Spanish Harlem.

THE BOILER ROOM had its world premiere at the Old Globe Theatre, in San Diego, California, December 5, 1987 through January 17, 1988 with the following cast:

Olga *Karmin Murcelo*
Anthony *Juan Del Castillo Jr.*
Olivia *Allegra Swift*
Doug *Tim Donoghue*

Director *Craig Noel*
Scenic Designer *Kent Dorsey*
Lighting Designer *Kent Dorsey*
Costume Designer *Frank O. Bowers*
Sound Designer *Lucy Peckham*
Stage Manager *Robert Drake*

THE BOILER ROOM

SCENE: *A large boiler room which also serves as a living room.*

AT RISE: *Enter OLGA from bedroom. She is carrying a can of shoe polish, a rag, and a shoe brush. She rests the articles on the floor beside the boiler, ties a handkerchief to her head, and then proceeds to feed the boiler a few shovelfull of coal. She then wipes the boiler door of dusts and applies shoe polish to it. She picks up the brush, and while humming a cheerful Latin theme, brushes off the polish and admires the shine. She crosses to the dresser and brings out five candles and a book of matches. She places the candles across the top of the boiler and lights them. She removes the handkerchief from her head, kneels in front of the boiler, makes the sign of the cross and, with her hands still folded in front of her, begins to pray. Her prayer is recited in Spanish, but recited in a rapid manner and neither Spanish or English-speaking audiences should be able to fully make out what she's saying. During this scene the stage lights are concentrated on OLGA's head, shoulder and hands. The same light also reflects the front of the boiler with its door open and its flame roaring. It is a mystical and religious scene. Her prayer completed, OLGA stands and proceeds to blow out the candles one at a time. As each candle goes out, the stage lights broaden and OLGA closes the door. She finally gives the boiler one*

last gentle wipe and returns to humming that same cheerful Latin tune as she exits to the bedroom carrying the shoe polish and other articles.

For a moment the stage is alone as we listen to OLGA's humming offstage. The sound of someone attempting to enter the front door is heard and OLGA quickly reenters.

OLGA (*cheerful*). Coming...

(OLGA approaches the door but someone has opened it from the other side with a key. The door chain won't allow entrance and suddenly the door is forced open, breaking the chain in two. ANTHONY stumbles in and locks the door behind him. His face and hands are dirty and some tools are sticking out of his back pockets.)

ANTHONY. You and that stupid chain! One of these days they're going to grab me right outside that door 'cause of that stupid chain!

OLGA. What *theys*?

ANTHONY. Theys, that's all. The kind of theys that put you in jail.

OLGA (*as she exits to the bedroom carrying the broken door chain*). Stop making up stories.

ANTHONY (*louder so that OLGA can hear offstage*). You're going to think it's a *nightmare* when you have to take a train and two buses to visit me on Riker's Island. (*He opens the front door and drags in a long and heavy cardboard box. He leaves the box in front of the couch and returns to the door. He presses his ear against the door and listens for a moment. He then crosses to the dresser and places his tools in the bottom drawer. He returns to*

the box, squats down beside it, and proceeds to look inside.)

(OLGA reenters trying to tie some electrical tape around the broken door chain.)

OLGA *(noticing the box)*. Didn't I tell you not to bring those filthy car parts into this house? They're dirty. And with those friends of yours, they're probably stolen too.

ANTHONY *(matter-of-fact, his head in the box as he searches inside)*. You know they're stolen.

OLGA. Just get it out of here this minute, Anthony! *(She tries pushing the box but it's too heavy for her.)*

ANTHONY. I don't know what you're acting all proud and holy for. There's already stolen property in this house.

OLGA *(surprised)*. What are you talking about?

ANTHONY *(pointing to the television set)*. What do you think that is?

OLGA. You stole that?

ANTHONY. No, I put it on my American Express. *(OLGA rushes to where ANTHONY is squatting and slaps him hard on the head. The blow causes him to fall backwards to the floor.)*

OLGA. I'm your mother, damnit! You watch what you say to me! And get this junk out of my house! *(This time she tries pushing the box with her foot but it's still too heavy for her.)* Get it out, I said! *(ANTHONY has taken the blow lightly and calmly pats his hair back into place as he watches her struggling with the box. He reaches inside the box and hands OLGA a small gift-wrapped box. Her mood abruptly changes.)*...You got me something? *(She starts removing the wrapping paper.)* You're such a good boy, Anthony. Are you keeping up with your school work? *(He*

doesn't answer and anxiously waits for her to finish opening the gift. OLGA excitedly pulls out a woman's bracelet.)

Oh, Anthony...It's beautiful.

ANTHONY. Put it on, Ma.

OLGA. Here, you do it for me. *(She hands ANTHONY the bracelet and he stands and begins to carefully tie it to her wrist.)* It's so nice, Anthony. *(She kisses him on the head. He finishes and steps back to admire her.)* How many carats is it?

ANTHONY. It's not real gold, Ma.

OLGA *(disappointed)*. Not real?

ANTHONY. It's plated. Fourteen carat.

OLGA *(still disappointed)*. Oh...*(Disappointed by OLGA's reaction, ANTHONY quietly returns to his box.)*

ANTHONY. I thought you'd like it.

OLGA. Yeah...I guess it's kinda nice...

ANTHONY. I'll take it back. *(She holds her arm up in front of the mirror above the dresser to model the bracelet.)*

OLGA. It's nice, Anthony...Nobody can tell it's not real if we don't tell them, right?

ANTHONY *(still disappointed, his head in the box)*. Right, Ma. *(OLGA removes the bracelet and places it in the top dresser drawer. She then returns to the box.)*

OLGA. What else you got? *(ANTHONY pulls out a car alternator and proudly displays it.)*

ANTHONY. Look at that. Can't be more than a year old.

OLGA *(not really interested)*. That's nice, Anthony. *(She pats him on the head and looks inside the box. ANTHONY reaches in his pants pocket and hands her a roll of bills.)*

ANTHONY. I sold some tires this morning. Forty bucks. Pretty good, hah?

OLGA. You helped somebody with some tires? You're a nice boy, Anthony. *(Again she pats him on the head.)*

ANTHONY. No, Ma. I helped *myself* to some tires. (OLGA seems not to have heard his last comment and proceeds to anxiously count the money which seems to be mostly in dollar bills. ANTHONY seems to have forgotten the incident with the bracelet and again seems like a little boy awaiting his mother's approval and maybe even another pat on the head. He proudly slaps the side of the box.) I'll get rid of these later. (OLGA squints at fear of losing count.) Guy only wanted to give me twenty-five but I held out. Guy didn't know who he was dealing with. Suckers were brand new. I don't sell no garbage, you know. (OLGA finishes counting the money and stuffs it in her bra.) Don't I get a kiss? (OLGA leans over and gives him a small peck at the top of the head. at the same time she takes another glance inside the box.)

OLGA. You have to get that junk out of here. Olivia is coming home.

ANTHONY (surprised). I thought she was supposed to be in Europe or something. (He throws his head to the air as he pronounces Europe.)

OLGA. They just got back. She wants to see the apartment.

ANTHONY. What apartment?

OLGA (matter-of-fact). Mrs. Downing in 4E is dead.

ANTHONY. Olivia wants to live *here*? (He laughs.) What happened to her rich lawyer husband that she's so ashamed of bringing here to visit? What happen, he make a bad investment or something?

OLGA. For your information, wise-guy, Olivia said this building is going co-op.

ANTHONY (laughing). This dump? What are you, crazy?

OLGA. Oh, you don't know nothing, Anthony. You're just a stupid kid. Haven't you seen what they did to a-hundred-and-fifth?

ANTHONY. I don't care what they did to a-hundred-and-fifth. All they're going to do to this place is put two bombs down here and two on the roof and blow it up so they can collect on the insurance. And when that day comes, I think we should go out and celebrate.

OLGA. What about that co-op they just put up on a-hundred-and-third? Hah, wise-guy? What about that?

ANTHONY. That ain't no co-op, Ma. That's an old age home.

OLGA. ...Are you sure? Olivia said...

ANTHONY (*interrupting*). Olivia is full of shit. And what are you making such a big deal over her for, hah? She wasn't here when we needed her so why are you making such a big deal over her now? Why don't you make a big deal over me for a change? It was me who helped you, Ma. It was *me*.

OLGA. She wasn't here 'cause she was traveling. But you better believe that if she was here she would have taken care of everything just fine 'cause she's my daughter and she cares about me. And it'll be nice having somebody around here that cares about me for a change.

ANTHONY. She would've called the cops is what she would've done and right now you'd be on Riker's Island eating baloney and tea. (*OLGA turns to the boiler and makes the sign of the cross.*) Oh, Jesus Christ, Ma! Don't start that shit up again! You're driving me crazy with this praying shit all the time!

OLGA. I don't want you bringing it up anymore, Anthony. I don't want you talking about it ever again.

ANTHONY. I'm sorry.

OLGA. There are places for little things like you, you know. All I have to do is make one call over there (*She point to the phone.*) and you'll be gone just like that. (*She snaps her fingers.*)

ANTHONY. How you expect me to forget it when every time I turn around you're over there praying to that stupid boiler?

OLGA. I could force you to forget it, that's how. In Puerto Rico when we wanted the pigs to stop digging up the ground with their noses we'd hit them on the head with a broom until they stopped. I'm almost certain the same thing would work on you.

ANTHONY. I said I was sorry.

OLGA. Have you ever heard of Warwick? The Warwick School For Mentally Disturbed Little Monsters just like you? Riker's Island is a country club compared to Warwick. That's where I'm going to put you. I talked to Dona Rosario the other day and already the color is coming back to her cheeks, ever since she had that little monster of hers...what's his name?

ANTHONY. Tommy.

OLGA. That's right, Tommy. She looks a hundred times better ever since she had him put away.

ANTHONY. Maybe now that Olivia is coming back with her rich lawyer husband you don't need me anymore.

OLGA. And since when did I ever need you for anything? Hah? Answer me that. Can you take me dancing? Can you take me out for a drink? I'd look ridiculous is what I'd look if I ever went dancing with a little twerp like you.

ANTHONY. You're not fooling nobody, you know. I know what you're up to, Ma. You just want to give Olivia that apartment upstairs and then move right in with them, don't you? That's why you're making such a big deal, isn't it?

OLGA. I knew you'd spoil it for me. I just knew it. Ever since Miguel brought me down here all I ever wanted was to move upstairs like normal human beings and now you're going to spoil it for me, aren't you?

ANTHONY. What do you think, that Olivia's husband is going to want to wake up every morning and see your face asleep on the couch?

OLGA. See. See what I mean? You're just a stupid kid. You don't know nothing. That apartment is in the E line. Every apartment in the E line has two bedrooms. One for Olivia and her husband and one for me.

ANTHONY. And what about me? (*OLGA doesn't answer.*)
What about me, Ma?...What's going to happen to me?

OLGA. I knew you'd spoil it for me. I just knew it.

ANTHONY. We don't need her to move upstairs, Ma. You and me can move upstairs together.

OLGA. What's the matter with you? Are you stupid today or something? You know we don't pay rent down here. What do you think, the landlord is going to give a us an apartment upstairs for free?

ANTHONY. They promised us a free apartment when we moved here.

OLGA. Oh, forget about that, Anthony. That was ten years ago and it wasn't even the same owner then. And how you know about that, anyway?

ANTHONY. Poppi told me. He told me he was sorry that I had to live down here but that they had promised him an oil boiler and a free apartment upstairs but that they never gave it to him and that now they were forcing him to live under their feet.

OLGA. Nobody ever made Miguel do nothing. And you're just like him, stubborn. Maybe if he wasn't so stubborn things could have turned out better than they did.

ANTHONY. Things are going to get worse is what's going to happen. (*He coughs.*) You hear that? I'm beginning to sound just like him.

OLGA. Stop that!!!

ANTHONY (*again making himself cough*). That's not supposed to be like that, you know. It's supposed to be clear. (*Continues to cough.*)

OLGA (*covering her ears*). Stop that!!! Stop it!!! (*She kicks ANTHONY's box.*) And get this junk out of here! Get it out, I said!!

ANTHONY. This stuff ain't junk, all right?! If this is junk, then you're junk 'cause this is what feeds you. (*OLGA takes a swing at him but ANTHONY catches her hand and holds her arm up in the air.*)

OLGA. Go ahead. Hit me. I know you want to. (*ANTHONY continues to hold her arm in the air.*) Go ahead, you lousy no-good bum. How can you even *think* of hitting your own mother? (*She slaps him across the face with her free hand and breaks away from him.*) You're no son of mine. (*He stands to the side with tears running down his face. He checks his mouth for blood.*) What did I ever do to deserve a son like you. (*She angrily passes a hand over the plastic covers on the couch.*) And this filthy coal dust!! Look at it! It's getting worse. I can't control it anymore! (*OLGA grabs a rag from the dresser and begins to wipe down the couch. She moves to the television and then to the floor directly in front of the boiler. On hands and knees.*) Look at it! Look at it! (*She continues to frantically wipe at the floor until she finally exits into the kitchen still on hands and knees. ANTHONY wipes the tears from his eyes and collects the scattered car parts and places them back inside his box. He drags the box to the front door and then crosses to the dresser. He opens the top dresser drawer and pulls out the bracelet he had given to OLGA. He stands for a moment rubbing the bracelet between his fingers while looking off towards the kitchen area. He finally throws the bracelet back into the drawer, slams the drawer shut and removes*

his tools from the bottom drawer. He exits through the front door dragging his box. For a brief moment we view an empty stage with a separate light on the boiler. LIGHTS FADE.)

SCENE TWO

AT RISE: *Empty stage. There's a light knock at the door. No one answers. Another knock. Again no one answers and OLIVIA enters followed by DOUG who is carrying a large gift-wrapped package with a ribbon around the top.*

OLIVIA. *Ma...Ma, it's me. (DOUG is taken aback by the boiler. He looks from the boiler, to the pipes above his head, and then back to the boiler.)*

DOUG. This is a boiler room.

OLIVIA *(a bit sarcastic).* That's very good, Doug. *(She sticks her head into the kitchen.)* Ma...

DOUG. I thought you meant a basement apartment. *(He looks around again.)* This is really a boiler room.

OLGA *(offstage from bedroom).* Olivia? Is that you?

OLIVIA. It's me, Ma. Doug is with me.

(OLGA enters from the bedroom wearing a new dress and one high-heeled shoe. She limps over to OLIVIA and embraces her.)

OLGA. This is wonderful, Olivia. You really brought him over.

PRODUCTION NOTES

SET: A large boiler room which also serves as a living room. The boiler sits U with a pile of coal directly to its right. Above stage and directly above the coal there are two metal coal chute doors and throughout the play passersby can be heard walking across the doors from the above and offstage sidewalk. The boiler room floor is covered in linoleum and many areas, particularly the areas directly in front of the boiler, are worn and faded. Pipes of various lengths and circumferences protrude from the boiler and disappear into the walls and ceiling around the boiler. Two plastic plants hang from these pipes.

D and almost C sits a couch protected by plastic covers. An old wooden coffee table sits in front of the couch with carefully arranged knickknacks resting on top. DL and against the wall sits a large floor-model color television set with a large glass tiger resting on top. The design of the television is modern and conflicts with the rest of the room. UL there is a door which leads to the offstage bedroom. UR and beside the coal there is an entrance leading to the offstage kitchen and bathroom areas. The front door is located at the center of the left wall.

In spite of the inexpensive quality of the furniture and obvious intrusion of the boiler, a fair amount of care has gone into making the room warm and comfortable.