

ALMA VIEJA

by Dillon Yruegas

Characters

YASMINE: late teens-early 20s. Mixed. Queer. Femme. Bilingual

LA CURANDERA: 40s-80s. Indigenous Mexican. Femme. Bilingual

ABUELITA: 60s-70s. Indigenous Mexican. Straight. Cis woman. Spanish speaking only

MAMÁ: 40s-50s. Indigenous Mexican. Straight. Cis woman. Spanish speaking only

FATHER: 40s-50s. White. Straight. Cis man. English speaking only. Can be double cast with one of the VENDORS

PRIEST: 30s-60s. Bilingual. Can be double cast with one of the VENDORS

VENDOR 1 & 2

ACT I

Scene 1

*A small Roman Catholic church.
Sunday mass. The PRIEST is at
the pulpit, frozen, giving his
homily. YASMINE is seated in the
second pew with her MAMÁ and
FATHER, who are also frozen.
She stands and addresses the
audience.*

YASMINE

The world I grew up in always told me I have but one life to live.
Certain people in this world, however, have informed me that I am
in possession of an old soul.

*An old woman (LA
CURANDERA) enters.*

LA CURANDERA

Tienes un alma vieja, chica.

She exits.

YASMINE

¿Qué significa, señora? What does it mean to have an old soul in a
world that believes in but one life?

She sits. The PRIEST quickens.

PRIEST

Just as the Lord Jesus Christ helped the poor, sick and dying, so
are we called to help those in need during our short time on Earth.
We follow in His footsteps so that we may live with Him in Heaven
for all eternity.

*He freezes again. YASMINE
stands and addresses the
audience.*

YASMINE

I sit in front with my family. Second pew. The first was saved for the
elderly and physically disabled. No one in my family had any

physical ailments, so we sat as far up front as we could. Second pew. That is, however, until mi abuelita became sick. Sick for the last time.

During this, ABUELITA enters, crosses to the front pew, and sits.

ABUELITA
Mija, siéntate conmigo, por favor.

YASMINE
(moving to the front pew)
Sí, abuelita. Sí.

ABUELITA
Gracias, mijita.

ABUELITA freezes along with the others on stage.

YASMINE
Then and only then did I sit with her. First pew. For two years, every Sunday. First pew.

ABUELITA quickens.

ABUELITA
Mija, siéntate conmigo, por favor.

YASMINE
Sí, abuelita. Sí.

ABUELITA
Gracias, mijita.

ABUELITA exits. YASMINE moves to the second pew.

YASMINE
It wasn't until her funeral that I sat with the rest of my family again. Second pew.

The PRIEST quickens.

PRIEST

Ella era una buena madre, amiga y criada a Diós. She was a good mother, friend, and servant to God.

He freezes.

YASMINE

What a difference it makes. Second pew. First pew. Second pew. Healthy. Sick. Dead. I rarely cried. First, when I found out she passed. Then about a month later. Then two months after that. And so on and so forth, until I was all cried out, it seemed. Two years later, back to first pew.

MAMÁ quickens.

MAMÁ

Mija, siéntate en la primera. Tu rodilla.

YASMINE

(moving to the front pew)

Sí, Mamá. Sí.

MAMÁ

¿Quieres me siento contigo?

YASMINE

No, Mamá. No.

MAMÁ

Bueno, mijita.

MAMÁ freezes.

YASMINE

I was in an accident involving a car. My car. It had a flat. I would later find out, a faulty e-break as well. It had a manual transmission. It was parked on a slight incline. While changing the tire, it suddenly rolled back onto my knee. I knew not to keep my legs under the car and yet, there they were and here I am. First pew.

MAMÁ quickens

MAMÁ

Mija, siéntate en la primera. Tu rodilla.

YASMINE

Sí, Mamá. Sí.

MAMÁ
¿Quieres me siento contigo?

YASMINE
No, Mamá. No.

MAMÁ
Bueno, mijita.

MAMÁ freezes.

YASMINE
(moving to the second pew)
It took two years till I could walk without any assistance. Two years.
Second pew.

The PRIEST quickens.

PRIEST
Thank God for Yasmine's recovery. How wonderful it is that she
may walk unaided again!

He freezes.

YASMINE
What a difference it makes. Second pew. First pew. Second pew.
Funeral. Titanium knee. Limp. I cried a lot when it happened. I
would pass out from the pain. After my surgery, I rarely cried. Once
about a month later. Then two months after that. And so on and so
forth until I was all cried out, again. Two years later, I stopped going
to mass.

Scene 2

Home. Living area. FATHER is seated at his big chair. MAMÁ is seated on the couch, closest to FATHER. YASMINE sits on the arm rest of the couch opposite MAMÁ. Both parents are frozen. YASMINE addresses the audience.

YASMINE

I didn't think they would understand. They were good people. Good Catholics. Mamá told me several times after Abuelita's death:

MAMÁ quickens.

MAMÁ

Necesito ir a la iglesia. Necesito recibir el cuerpo y sangre de cristo. Sin Él, no puedo vivir.

MAMÁ freezes.

YASMINE

I knew she wouldn't understand. Neither would Father. As a convert, he saw the Church as his salvation as well as a place to focus his energy in a positive manner.

FATHER quickens.

FATHER

I may not have been the most pious of men in my youth, but I will surely make up for my transgressions for the rest of my life.

FATHER freezes.

YASMINE

I knew he wouldn't understand either. My transgression was far greater than his indiscretions of youth. I was questioning the Church at its very foundation.

LA CURANDERA enters.

LA CURANDERA

Tienes un alma vieja, chica.

She exits.

YASMINE

¿Qué significa, señora? What does it mean to have an old soul in a world that believes in but one life?

Both MAMÁ and FATHER quicken.

MAMÁ

¿Qué te preocupa, hija?

YASMINE

No hay nada, Mamá.

MAMÁ

Hija, no mentiras. ¿Recuerdas el cuarto mandamiento?

YASMINE

Honor thy father and mother.

MAMÁ

Sí, hija. Entonces, ¿qué te preocupa?

Beat

YASMINE

¿Qué significa "alma vieja?"

MAMÁ

(gasping) ¿Quién te dijo?

YASMINE

Una señora de la iglesia.

MAMÁ

¡¿Cual?!

YASMINE

No recuerdo su nombre.

FATHER

What exactly did she say to you?

YASMINE
"Tienes un alma vieja."

FATHER
A woman of the Church told you this?

YASMINE
I think so.

FATHER
You think?

YASMINE
Well, I've only seen her at church.

FATHER
During mass?

YASMINE
Um, no actually. Only before or after.

MAMÁ
¡La bruja!

YASMINE
¿Bruja?

FATHER
Yes, well... more commonly known as a "curandera."

YASMINE
You mean that woman the people take their sick to and she rubs an egg over them?

FATHER
Yes. It's a form of magic that they try to justify its use with the church by beseeching God, the archangels, and the saints.

YASMINE
But, Father, doesn't the Bible and the Church denounce the use of magic?

FATHER
Well, yes. You see, whenever the Spanish came to the Americas, they brought along several monks and missionaries to convert the

Natives. Somewhere during the course of this, the missionaries agreed to let the Natives continue certain practices, as long as they replaced their gods with God, the archangels, and the saints. For some unknown reason, these practices continue today.

MAMÁ

Todos los curanderos son malhechores quién hace las órdenes del diablo. Por favor, no escuches a esos malignos, hija.

YASMINE

Sí, Mamá. Sí.

FATHER

I agree. Nothing good can come from you paying any attention to that woman.

YASMINE

Yes, Father. Okay.

Scene 3

YASMINE'S room. It is relatively bare with only a bed, dresser and a desk. She is seated at the desk on her computer.

YASMINE

I did not honor Mamá nor Father's wishes. That night, I stayed up for several hours scouring the internet for answers. I researched curanderismo, its history, its practice and uses. I tried looking for it on various Catholic websites and message boards. There were pages upon pages of debates concerning curanderismo and its affiliation with the Church. There was nothing concrete concerning its use with the Church. I even tried to search the Vatican website; it was nothing but tourism and basic teachings of the Church.

An advertisement voice-over is heard.

V.O.

Come attend mass at Saint Peter's Basilica and get your marriage blessed by the Holy Father!

YASMINE

No theology. No answers. The most concrete answer I had was from my parents and that was obviously biased.

Her parents enter at opposite sides of the stage.

MAMÁ

Todos los curanderos son malhechores quienes hacen las órdenes del diablo. Por favor, no escuches a esos malignos, hija.

YASMINE
Sí, Mamá. Sí.

FATHER

I agree. Nothing good can come from you paying any attention to that woman.

YASMINE
Yes, Father. Okay.

They freeze.

YASMINE

I couldn't sleep that night nor the next. No matter how much I searched, I could not find any answers. It preoccupied me. This could not have come at a worse time. In less than a week, I was off to university. A small, private, Catholic university to study theology. I thought a long time about it. I didn't want to become a nun, but I did want to pursue theological academics.

Her parents quicken and cross to her.

MAMÁ

Mija, ¿porque no quieres ser una criada de Dios como una monja?

YASMINE

No sé, Mamá.

FATHER

Well, at least study theology. Academics are good for you. And who knows, María, maybe our daughter will change her mind later.

YASMINE

Yes, Father. Okay.

MAMÁ

Sí. Vas a la universidad, mijita.

YASMINE

Sí, Mamá. Sí.

Scene 4

*University dorm room. The same
as her room at home, without a
dresser, plus boxes.*

YASMINE

Mamá cried whenever she and Father left me in my dorm room.
Father didn't.

MAMÁ

Tienes cuidado, hija.

YASMINE

Sí, Mamá. Sí.

FATHER

Study well and stay out of trouble.

YASMINE

Yes, Father. Okay.

MAMÁ

¡Adiós hija; mi única!

YASMINE

Hasta luego, Mamá.

FATHER

Take care.

YASMINE

Yes, Father. Okay.

They exit.

YASMINE

And that was that. University was three hours from home but, with
such a heavy course load, I was not able to visit home as often as
Mamá liked. She called every day, though.

MAMÁ enters.

MAMÁ

¿Cómo estás, hija?

YASMINE
Bien, Mamá.

MAMÁ
¿Cómo está tu día?

YASMINE
Bien, Mamá.

MAMÁ
¿Estudias mucho?

YASMINE
Sí, Mamá. Sí.

MAMÁ
¡Que bueno!

MAMÁ exits.

YASMINE
The more I studied theology, the more I didn't believe in it anymore.
I found myself disenchanted with mass and the Church, especially
with its more devout followers.

The PRIEST enters.

PRIEST
Just as the Lord Jesus Christ helped the poor, sick and dying, so
are we called to help those in need during our short time on Earth.
We follow in His footsteps so that we may live with Him in Heaven
for all eternity.

He exits.

YASMINE
I stopped going to mass as often. Every other week for about a
month when I first moved here. Then two weeks. Then once a
month. Then not at all. The only time I attended mass regularly was
when I was home for Christmas break and Easter. Every other
break I stayed on campus, using my studies as an excuse. I even
took classes during the summer so I wouldn't have to stay at home.
Father was very proud of my 4.0 GPA and gladly accepted my
requests to stay at university.

FATHER *enters.*

FATHER

Of course! I understand. Your studies should come first at this time
in your life. Keep up the good work.

YASMINE

Yes, Father. Thank you.

He exits.

YASMINE

Mamá wasn't too happy, but she understood as well.

MAMÁ *enters.*

MAMÁ

¡Ay, mijita! Te extraño mucho.

YASMINE

Sí, Mamá. Y usted también.

MAMÁ

¿Cómo estás?

YASMINE

Bien, Mamá.

MAMÁ

¿Estudias mucho?

YASMINE

Sí, Mamá. Sí.

MAMÁ

¡Qué bueno!

MAMÁ *exits.*

YASMINE

I never revealed my secret. I would never tell them. I know they
would never understand.

Scene 5

Urban street near a park.

YASMINE

One weekend, I decided to venture out of the university and into the city. I had visited the downtown area a few times in high school, but nothing could have prepared me for this adventure. I found myself at the historic district among several gorgeous older buildings and a small park. In this park, there were several vendors, selling various items like organic vegetables, jewelry, and clothing.

Two vendors enter with their wares.

VENDOR 1

Ah, pretty lady. Pretty necklace. Pretty necklace for the pretty lady?

VENDOR 2

¡Oye muchacha! Tengo muchas camisas bonitas. ¿Quieres una chica?

LA CURANDERA enters behind them.

LA CURANDERA

Tienes un alma vieja, chica.

All except YASMINE freeze.

YASMINE

I was taken by surprise. It was her, the curandera from home! Even though she was the one who spurred my questioning of theology, I hadn't thought of her since coming to university. How did she get here? Did she follow me?

All quicken.

YASMINE

¿Qué significa, señora?

LA CURANDERA

Tienes el conocimiento y la razón de un personaje más viejo como tú.

YASMINE

I've always been told that I'm smarter than all the others my age.
But, what do you mean?

LA CURANDERA

Soy de ti y eres de mi. Somos la misma persona. (*beat*) In general,
of course.

YASMINE

We're the same person? Lo siento, no entiendo.

LA CURANDERA

Todos del mundo son del mismo alma, chica. You and I, however,
were created in the old times. Muchas personas en este tiempo
tienen almas nuevas. We, unfortunately, are some of the last of our
kind.

YASMINE

We're all of one soul, yet some were created before others. You
and I are the last—

YASMINE, *overwhelmed with the
news, sits.*

YASMINE

I'm sorry, señora. No lo entiendo.

LA CURANDERA

Ay chica, está bien. Por favor, come with me y nos vamos a mi
casa.

YASMINE

Your house? You live near here?

LA CURANDERA

Yo vivo en todos lados. Let's go.

YASMINE

Sí, señora. Sí.

They exit.

Scene 6

The interior of LA CURANDERA'S house. It is small, intimate, and adorned with various religious items, depictions of el campo, and candles. An altar with a large Virgen de Guadalupe statue at its center, a sahumerio shaped like a copa, a few different calaveras, and photos in frames stands in a corner close to the fireplace. Several large bunches of herbs and flowers are hanging to dry. The rest of the room holds a low table with stools, a seating area marked by oversized pillows covered with sarapes and falsa blankets, and a slightly raised small bed with a few colchas and stacks of books beside it. LA CURANDERA motions for YASMINE to enter.

LA CURANDERA
Entra, chica. Come inside.

YASMINE
Gracias, señora. Que Dios bendiga su casa.

LA CURANDERA
Gracias, querida.

LA CURANDERA moves to the fireplace and stokes the smoldering embers. She motions for YASMINE to sit, then begins to gather some of the herbs that are drying, places them in a small kettle, and leaves it close to the fire. As the herbs steep, she moves to the altar, places fatwood and charcoal in the sahumerio, lights it, then adds

copal. She cleanses herself, YASMINE, the altar, and the rest of the room. Once she is finished, she pours the tea and moves to sit with YASMINE.

LA CURANDERA
Toma, chica.

YASMINE
Gracias, señora.

They sit in silence, drinking their tea. After a few moments of curiously looking around, YASMINE gets up and makes her way toward the altar. She picks up a bit of the copal.

YASMINE
Señora, what is this?

LA CURANDERA
Es copal from the incense tree. En Nahuatl es copalquabuitl.

YASMINE
Copalquabuitl. It smells just like the incense they use in mass.

LA CURANDERA
¡Por supuesto! Where do you think they stole it?

YASMINE
Oh. I remember my Father telling me how the missionaries allowed the Natives to continue certain practices, as long as they replaced their gods with God, the archangels, and the saints, but I had no idea that they stole from the Natives.

LA CURANDERA
Us, querida. They stole from us. Y claro que esos pinches colonizadores robaron de nuestras prácticas; the entire Church is a mix of stolen faiths!

YASMINE
I- I'm not sure what to... us?

LA CURANDERA
Tu mamá es mexicana, ¿no?

YASMINE
Sí, pero—

LA CURANDERA
¿Y tiene el pelo como chocolate, oscuro y fluye?

YASMINE
Sí...

LA CURANDERA
¿Y la piel como la tierra de donde es su familia?

YASMINE
Sí.

LA CURANDERA
Then say “us” whenever you speak of indígenas de esta tierra
porque te incluye, chica.

YASMINE
But my Father, he’s—

LA CURANDERA
Ay el gringo, sí. Pero no te preocupes, everyone is indigenous to
somewhere. The colonizers have forgotten their lands, their spirits,
and their stories. The longer their generations stay away from their
roots, the angrier and more spiteful they become, for their souls are
lost, longing for their ancestral home. Y tu papá, en su sufrimiento
ha encontrado la reconciliación en la iglesia y tu mamá. Within you,
chica y tu alma vieja que conoce todo de estos traumas, is the
ability to break the generational curses.

*A long silence as YASMINE
takes it all in. LA CURANDERA is
patient, waiting, sipping her tea.*

YASMINE
So what do I do?

LA CURANDERA
¿Mande?

YASMINE

What do I do? How do I fix this? How do I make it go away?

LA CURANDERA

You can't simply make it go away...

YASMINE

No! No, you don't get to say that! You don't get to taunt me almost my entire life, coming and going as you please, making me question everything I was taught, everything my parents told me, everything that I thought was the truth. You don't get to upend my life, after all the sleepless nights, all the tears, to not have an answer on how to fix this! What do I do?!

LA CURANDERA

Ay hija, no es tan sencillo como eso, to "fix" it, y no será fácil ni rápido. You must learn and unlearn. You must take this new journey, pero no estarás sola. I can guide you, teach you everything you need para comenzar este viaje.

YASMINE

But, that's still so much...

LA CURANDERA

Sí yo sé. It's a lifelong journey que ya has empezado cuando escuchaste mi voz. This is the most difficult part: do you choose to continue your life as you know it, studying and obeying the laws of those who eradicated our people? Or do you choose this new path of healing?

YASMINE moves back to the altar. She takes another long moment to take this all in. LA CURANDERA moves to stoke the fire once more and YASMINE turns to her.

YASMINE

Pues bien, señora. Where do we start?

LA CURANDERA

Tonita. Me llamo Tonita, hija.

LA CURANDERA moves to the altar and begins to point out

*various objects, showing them,
explaining and demonstrating
their uses to YASMINE.*

End of play