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Dulce

By

RAMON ESQUIVEL

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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RAMON ESQUIVEL

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(DULCE)

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Dulce was a part of the Latinx Theatre Commons TYA Sin Fronteras Festival & Convening (Austin, Texas) in 2019. The play was later performed by the Pacific Conservatory Theatre’s Outreach Tour (Santa Maria, Calif.) in October 2023.

CAST:

MEMO..... Tony Gutierrez
CECI..... Ella Sorrano
LUISAIxtla Vazquez
ABUELITA..... Jacquelyn Morales

PRODUCTION:

Director Marilet Martinez
Stage ManagerLolly Tolan
Costume Designer.....Brenda Arcos
Scenic Designer Natasha D’Amico
Sound Designer..... Liliana Heuring-McBride
Props Lead Faye Quintero Nuñez
Booking Coordinator Jill Price

Dulce was a winner of the 2007 Waldo M. and Grace C. Bonderman Playwriting for Youth Workshop and Symposium, and featured in rehearsed reading at Indiana Repertory Theatre.

A revised version of *Dulce* was presented as a staged reading at the 2018 Austin Latino New Play Festival at Teatro Vivo.

Dulce

CHARACTERS

MEMO: A chubby boy, 10 years old.

LUISA: Memo's mother, in her 30s or 40s. Also plays Teresa.

CECI: Memo's sister, 14 years old. Also plays Tere and Teresita.

ABUELITA: Memo's grandmother, in her 50s to 70s.

TERE: Abuelita as a girl, 14 years old.

TERESA: Abuelita as a young mother, in her 30s or 40s.

LUISITA: Luisa as a girl, 14 years old.

PRODUCTION NOTES

SETTING: Time is the present at the end of summer. Action occurs in a bedroom in the Mendoza family's home in Seattle. The set should convey a small and cramped space, yet also provide enough space for actors to dance, climb on top of things and generally create safe chaos.

LANGUAGE: English translations of Spanish dialogue appear in [brackets]. These are included for the benefit of actors, directors and readers. The translations may not be used to substitute the Spanish dialogue in production. Lean into the bilingual nature of the play.

Dulce

(A bedroom. A mishmash of antique furniture, including a rocking chair, bedding and other stuff that a fourteen-year-old might choose. A grand bed defines the space. On it are several boxes. MEMO enters.)

MEMO. Abuelita, I'm home! Abuelita?

(LUISA enters.)

LUISA. Memo, are you going to let your mom hug you? I've missed you!

(They hug.)

MEMO. Hi, Mom. Where's Abuelita?

LUISA. Dad was supposed to tell you in the car, but he couldn't do it. Now he's off to work ...

MEMO. Now you have to tell me. Is Abuelita back in the hospital?

LUISA. No, no more hospitals, thank God. Your grandmother ... she ...

MEMO. Died? Abuelita died. Didn't she?

LUISA. Yes. It was peaceful. She went to sleep, and then didn't wake up. That was two weeks ago.

(MEMO takes this in. Maybe he sits in the rocking chair.)

LUISA. Tío said you were having fun with your cousins in El Paso. We asked him not to say anything, so you could enjoy your trip. We wanted to tell you ourselves.

(MEMO is silent.)

CECI enters. She hugs MEMO.)

CECI. Hey, Memo. Welcome home.

(MEMO is still silent.)

LUISA. I just told him about Abuelita.

CECI. Dad chickened out, huh?

LUISA. He says he's not good at things like this. It's hard for all of us. But Abuelita wouldn't want us to be sad. She'd want us to be happy. Remember how much she loved to see you laugh?

(LUISA tickles MEMO. He kind of giggles.)

CECI. He doesn't seem sad at all.

(MEMO is still silent.)

LUISA. He's being strong, like the young man that he is.

CECI. He's ten.

LUISA. You know what helps me? Keeping busy. How can we help you, Ceci?

CECI. I'm almost done putting clothes in boxes. Can you take the chair, though?

LUISA. I'll go make room in the garage. Memo, help me carry Abuelita's rocking chair.

(MEMO is still silent.)

LUISA and MEMO exit with the rocking chair. CECI transfers clothes from the dresser and closet to boxes.)

A moment later, MEMO enters.)

CECI. So how was El Paso?

MEMO. Kind of fun. Kind of boring.

CECI. I'm sure it was way better than being stuck here.
You're so lucky.

MEMO. Why did you pack up Abuelita's stuff?

CECI. What do you mean? Mom did just tell you that Abuelita
... died. Right?

MEMO. I know she died.

CECI. We're donating her clothes to the church. Abuelita
asked us to. She said to sell her furniture too, but I like it,
even if it's old fashioned. Especially this big, old bed.

MEMO. You're moving in here?

CECI. Yup. For the first time in my life, I finally have my
own room.

(CECI continues putting clothes in boxes. When she turns away, MEMO takes them out of boxes and puts them back in the closet or drawers. CECI is increasingly baffled. Then MEMO pulls out caramel candies from a box.)

MEMO. Abuelita's *dulce*!

CECI. What are you doing? Mom, Memo's being annoying!

(LUIZA enters.)

LUIZA. I can't leave you two alone for five minutes. No! No
candy. *(She takes the candy bag away from him.)*

MEMO. Abuelita would have let me have it.

LUIZA. What did the dentist say? No candy—two cavities
last year. This must be her secret stash. We'll give it to the
Sunday School teachers.

MEMO. But you told my Sunday School teacher, “Don’t give Memo any candy, only apples.”

LUISA. Your teeth will thank me later. Go on, leave your sister alone.

(LUISA places the candy box on top of the wardrobe.)

MEMO. Nobody ever listens to me.

(MEMO exits.)

CECI. Why didn’t you tell him that I’m moving into Abuelita’s room? That was awkward.

LUISA. I’m sorry, I didn’t even think about it. Seeing all the changes must be strange for him.

CECI. It’s still strange for me.

LUISA. Are you still meeting your friends at the mall?

CECI. Yeah, we’re taking the 11:30 bus. What time is it?

LUISA. I don’t have my phone on me.

CECI. It would help if I had a phone too.

LUISA. Keep saving your pennies, we’ll talk. Hey, Memo!

MEMO *(offstage)*. What?!

LUISA. What time is it?

MEMO *(offstage)*. 11:15. Time to get out of Abuelita’s room.

CECI. You hear that?

LUISA. I’ll talk to him. Let’s take these boxes to the garage. I’ll finish washing your clothes.

CECI. Thanks, Mom. Please make sure Memo stays out of my room while I’m gone.

(LUISA and CECI exit with boxes. They lock the door.)

A short time passes. MEMO unlocks the door and enters. No one is there. He drags in the rocking chair and uses it to try and reach the box on top of the wardrobe.)

MEMO. Mom thinks she's so sneaky hiding the candy up there. *(More attempts to reach the candy.)* Gotta find my balance. I wish I had a little help.

(ABUELITA enters. It's not magical or especially theatrical; she just shows up with her walker.)

MEMO *(cont'd)*. Abuelita! If you can hear me, give me a sign!

ABUELITA. ¡Hola!

(MEMO is startled. ABUELITA laughs.)

MEMO. Abuelita?

ABUELITA. *Mi nieto querido.* [My dear grandson.]

MEMO. Are you a ghost?

ABUELITA. Are you afraid of your grandmother?

MEMO. A little bit, yeah. Hey! You're speaking English!

ABUELITA. Yes! I finally learned it after all this time. I speak Spanish and English now, and I am learning Swahili, Vietnamese and Hawaiian. I love the languages of Earth. I want to learn the languages of other planets too.

MEMO. Wow. Are you learning all these languages up in ... ?

ABUELITA. Si. "Heaven." "*El Cielo.*" "Paradise." "Up there."

MEMO. But ... you are dead. Right?

ABUELITA. Ay, this American culture is so afraid of the dead. I will go.

MEMO. Please stay! I'm not afraid. I just, you know, didn't expect to see you.

ABUELITA. Your eyes can see anything you wish them to see.

MEMO. Do you want to sit down? Look, I brought your rocking chair back.

ABUELITA. My chair! How kind of you. But I don't want to sit down, mijito. I want to dance!

(ABUELITA throws the walker aside and dances.)

MEMO. Look at you!

ABUELITA. Look at me!

MEMO. What about your walker?

ABUELITA. It was a prop. For theatricality! You really think I brought my bad hip with me to Heaven? And look at my smile.

MEMO. You have teeth!

ABUELITA. I got my teeth back! No more funny dentures. I get to bite into apples again.

MEMO. What about ... the bump on your stomach?

ABUELITA. You mean that ugly cancer? I left that behind too. Come here and feel.

(She takes his hand and gently places it on her side.)

MEMO. It feels soft.

ABUELITA. And squeezable.

(ABUELITA pulls MEMO into a full embrace.)

MEMO. Are you for real?

ABUELITA. I'm as real as you wish me to be.

MEMO. Let's go get Mom! She'll be so happy to see you.

ABUELITA. I'll see Luisa again in time. Your sister and dad too. I'm here for you. Dance with me.

MEMO. I'm not very good.

ABUELITA. Practice to get better. Your sister turns fifteen this year. You can dance at her quinceañera.

MEMO. Ceci's not gonna have a quinceañera.

ABUELITA. So I have heard. But things change. Come now. We waltz.

(MEMO waltzes awkwardly with ABUELITA.)

MEMO. You're good.

ABUELITA. You should have seen me when I was Ceci's age.

MEMO. Mom and Dad dance at weddings and stuff. It's weird because they dance really close and stare at each other. Like this. *(He demonstrates his parents' love gaze.)*

ABUELITA. Someday you will dance that way too, with your sweetheart.

MEMO. Eww, no.

ABUELITA. When I was a girl, I listened to the radio and danced while I did laundry, washed dishes, swept the floors. Sit in my chair. I want you to see something.

MEMO. What do you want me to see?

ABUELITA. Your eyes can see anything you wish them to see. Look through my eyes. See what I see. Remember what I remember.

(ABUELITA covers MEMO's eyes with her hands.)

Shift. TERE enters. She wears a Mexican-style dress of the era. Waltz music plays.)

MEMO. I hear music. Old music.

ABUELITA. Waltz music. Good music.

(ABUELITA uncovers MEMO's eyes. TERE looks at herself in a mirror. She doesn't notice MEMO and ABUELITA.)

MEMO. Is that you? You look just like Ceci!

ABUELITA. Your sister is beautiful, so thank you for the compliment.

MEMO. I didn't say Ceci was ...

ABUELITA. I'm at our house in Juarez, Mexico. My mother made that dress for *mí quinceañera*.

(TERE starts dancing to the waltz, the dress before her.)

MEMO. She made it?

ABUELITA. We couldn't afford to buy one. Fortunately, my mother was skilled with a sewing machine.

TERE *(calling off)*. ¡Mamá! ¡Mi vestido es tan bonito! [Mom, my dress is so beautiful!]

ABUELITA. “*Y soy bonita tambien.*” [And I am beautiful too.]

TERE *(to herself)*. *Y soy bonita tambien.*

(TERE exits. Waltz music fades out.)

ABUELITA. At fourteen years old, when I saw myself and my dress, I felt good about how I looked. I felt good about myself. It was a warm, sweet feeling. Every person needs moments like that.

MEMO. Did you like your *quinceañera*?

ABUELITA. To be the center of attention for once in my life? It was magical.

MEMO. Show me! I want to see.

(MEMO pulls ABUELITA's hands back over his eyes. When ABUELITA removes them, it is the present.)

ABUELITA. Maybe another time. I'm here now because I have a mission for you.

MEMO. Ooh, a mission? What is it?

ABUELITA. To find my most precious treasures.

(She points at the box atop the wardrobe.)

MEMO. ¡Dulce!

ABUELITA. We have a problem: the box is up there, but we are down here. What can we do?

MEMO. Can you fly?

ABUELITA. I just started walking again, now you want me to fly? We have to be patient with miracles.

MEMO. I can keep trying my first idea.

(MEMO clumsily tries to stand on the rocking chair.)

ABUELITA. Good use of resources. Keep trying, *mijito*.

(MEMO continues to struggle with balance.)

MEMO. When I get it, I'm gonna cram so much *dulce* in my mouth. Ugh! This isn't working.

CECI *(offstage)*. Mom, are you still doing laundry?

MEMO. Oh no. Ceci's home.

LUISA *(offstage)*. Your clothes are almost done in the dryer.

MEMO. She's coming. Hide!

(MEMO and ABUELITA throw a blanket over themselves. CECI enters.)

CECI. Umm ... Memo?

MEMO *(under the blanket, to ABUELITA)*. Total silence. Maybe she'll go away.

ABUELITA. Got it. Total silence.

CECI. Memo!

(CECI removes the blanket. She does not see ABUELITA.)

MEMO. Surprise?

CECI. Mom! Memo's being annoying.

MEMO. Look who it is, Ceci!

(He presents ABUELITA, who waves. She is delighted to see her granddaughter, but CECI doesn't see her.)

CECI. Who? What?

ABUELITA. Your sister doesn't see me, *mijito*.

(LUISA enters. ABUELITA is moved to see her daughter; but LUISA doesn't see her either.)

LUISA. I told you to respect your sister's space.

MEMO. But Mom, look!

ABUELITA. Your mother doesn't see me either.

(LUISA does see the rocking chair.)

LUISA. Memo, why did you bring the chair back in here? We put it in the garage.

MEMO. Don't you see?

LUISA. Ceci, go get your clothes. I'll handle this.

CECI. You should lock him up in his own room.

(CECI exits.)

LUISA. You need to respect Ceci's private space. This is her room now.

MEMO. But this is Abuelita's room.

LUISA. I know you want this room to stay just the way Abuelita had it. But think of your poor sister. She's been sleeping in the living room for months.

MEMO. But ...

LUISA. So do me a favor, take Abuelita's chair back to the garage. OK?

(LUISA exits. MEMO is alone with ABUELITA.)

MEMO. But Abuelita is right here. They really can't see you, huh?

ABUELITA. This mission is for your eyes only.

(ABUELITA points to the box on the wardrobe.)

MEMO. The dulce. We have to get it before Mom takes it to church, or else I'll never see it again.

ABUELITA. Do you have a plan?

MEMO. I just might. Can you climb on the bed with me?

(They climb on the bed.)

ABUELITA. Hello, old bed. Now what do we do?

MEMO. My friend has a trampoline, and we do this thing called a "double bounce." When I say GO, you push down really hard and I'll jump. The double bounce will launch me in the air, and I can knock the box down. OK?

ABUELITA. Sounds dangerous. Are you sure about this?

(They start bouncing.)

MEMO. Abuelita, you came back with a secret mission for me.

ABUELITA. Yes I did.