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The Country of the Blind

*Drama by
Frank Higgins*

*Adapted from the
story by H.G. Wells*

"Rich with insight ... a feat of imagination." —*The Pitch*, Kansas City

The Country of the Blind

Drama. By Frank Higgins. Adapted from the story by H.G. Wells. Cast: 3m., 3w. with doubling. May be expanded to 6m., 5w., extras. Eduardo, a poor farmer in a South American village, dreams of being in love. Frustrated by his poverty and disability of being blind in one eye, he turns his back on his own world and risks his life to find a mythical village high in the Andes mountains where everyone is blind and the streets are paved in gold. When he stumbles upon the village and realizes that the people who live there have no knowledge of the outside world, he fantasizes that "in the country of the blind the one-eyed man is king." However, he learns that the people have skills that he does not and that his presence is thought by the high priestess to be an infection that must be destroyed. He becomes friends with Medina, a beautiful girl who does not know that she is beautiful, whose job it is to determine whether he should live or die. When Medina and Eduardo fall in love, the leader decides that Eduardo can live, as long as the source of his crazy behavior—the tumors Eduardo calls "eyes"—are removed. Will Eduardo give up his sight for love? Or can he convince Medina to come to his world, where she will be regarded as the one who is less than normal? Premiered at the Coterie Theatre and toured Kansas under the auspices of Accessible Arts. Area staging. Approximate running time: 65 minutes. Code: CFL.

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featuring Lucian Connole and Vanessa Severo.

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THE COUNTRY OF THE BLIND

By
FRANK HIGGINS

Freely adapted from the story by
H.G. WELLS



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“First produced by the Coterie Theatre, Kansas City, Missouri,
in association with Accessible Arts, Inc.”

The Country of the Blind was originally produced by the Coterie Theatre of Kansas City, Missouri, in March of 2007, in association with Accessible Arts, Inc. Jeff Church, producing artistic director. Joette Pelster, executive director.

THE COMPANY

Eduardo Lucian Connole
The Storyteller/Old Eduardo Dale Westgaard
Medina. Vanessa Severo
Dashing Daniel/Pedro Alex Espy
Darling Delores/Priestess Rachel May Roberts
The Carnival Barker/the Leader Niccole Thurman
Villager/Ensemble Ashley Tilton
Villager/Ensemble Shannon Curry

PRODUCTION STAFF

Director Martin English
Music Director Kit Bardwell
Set Designer Jon Cupit
Costume Designer Georgianna Londre
Mask Designer Heidi Stubblefield
Lighting Designer Art Kent
Sound Designer David Kiehl
Stage Manager Amy M. Abels Owen

THE COUNTRY OF THE BLIND

CHARACTERS

3m., 3w. with doubling.

May be expanded to 6m., 5w., extra villagers.

THE STORYTELLER/OLD EDUARDO: He functions as storyteller and also as an audio describer for non-sighted audience members. He also plays a Worker in the carnival.

EDUARDO NUNEZ: A young peasant farmer. He wears an eye patch.

MEDINA: A blind young woman/doubles as a nondescript woman in town.

PEDRO: A blind young man/Dashing Daniel, a sighted man in the town.

THE LEADER: The female Leader of the Country of the Blind/doubles as the Carnival Barker.

THE PRIEST: The female advisor to the Leader in the Country of the Blind/doubles as Darling Delores.

SET & PROPS

A mostly bare stage so that the story can move from one location to another quickly. Important props will be a gold rock and a clothes basket for the Country of the Blind. The carnival booth and milk bottles at the top of the show can be real, or they can be mimed.

PLACE & TIME

A village at the foot of the Andes Mountains in Colombia and the Country of the Blind, a village high in the mountains. The time is the early 1900s.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The original production at the Coterie was performed with masks on the villagers and blindfolds on the people from the Country of the Blind. Only the Storyteller and Eduardo did not wear masks or blindfolds.

Eduardo, a penniless farmer, has left his world and climbed high into the Andes Mountains to find the mythical Country of the Blind where he hopes his life will be better. He becomes lost and exhausted, and cries out in despair:

EDUARDO. Nothing! I've climbed for days and found nothing! Everything I have done in my life has been for nothing! I can't take it anymore! God, please, do with me what you will. I give up!

STORYTELLER. He falls down the mountain and into a narrow valley.

(MEDINA and PEDRO in blindfolds enter.)

STORYTELLER (*cont'd*). A woman and man who have no eyes approach.

MEDINA. Whatever it is, it's big. Come on.

PEDRO. Wait. It could be a big rock that rolled down from the wall. It could start rolling again and crush us.

MEDINA. This rock has a heartbeat. And it smells human...almost. Come on.

PEDRO. No.

MEDINA. Are all men cowards? (*MEDINA goes to EDUARDO.*)

PEDRO. You are being reckless, Medina.

MEDINA. It has a bump on its head. It's bare-chested.

PEDRO. And barefoot. It's a baby.

MEDINA. A baby this big?

PEDRO. Couldn't a baby have a big body to go with its big stink?

MEDINA. Whatever it is, we need to take it to the Elders. Pick it up.

PEDRO. Uhhh, a big, smelly, *heavy* baby.

EDUARDO. Uhh...

PEDRO. Baby talk. I told you it was a baby. You ought to trust my opinion more. Men *know* things.

MEDINA. Where could this thing have come from? Is it a miracle?

EDUARDO. I came over the mountains.

PEDRO. Ah! (*The startled PEDRO drops him.*)

EDUARDO. Ohh, why did you drop me?

MEDINA. A baby that talks so quickly?

EDUARDO. Is this—this is it. The Country of the Blind.

MEDINA. "Blind"?

EDUARDO. It's all right. I'm from the outside. Where people can see?

MEDINA. “See”?

PEDRO. It talks crazy. It comes out of the rocks. Let’s hit it with a rock. (*The STORYTELLER makes the SOUND of a bird singing.*)

MEDINA. Listen!

PEDRO. Angels!

MEDINA. If the angels are singing, maybe they approve of his coming. Did you come from the angels?

EDUARDO. You mean those birds?

PEDRO. “Birds”? Listen, baby, do not use ugly words to describe sacred things.

MEDINA. It means no harm.

PEDRO. Anything that uses ugly words to describe angels did not come from the angels.

MEDINA. That is not for us to decide. Pick it up again.

EDUARDO. No, I can walk.

MEDINA. The baby talks *and* walks? You are very special.

EDUARDO. I’ve waited my whole life for someone to say that.

MEDINA. Your whole life? You were just born. Take my hand.

EDUARDO. No, I can see.

MEDINA. See? What is “see”?

EDUARDO. I can sense things in a way you can’t. (*EDUARDO stumbles over a gold rock.*) Uh!

MEDINA. But you stumble over the rock.

PEDRO. Big, smelly, *dumb* baby.

EDUARDO. Gold? You have gold nuggets this big?

MEDINA. Gold?

PEDRO. More crazy talk.

MEDINA. It’s a cleaning rock. We use these when we wash our clothes in the stream.

EDUARDO. You mean these rocks are common—yes! I see now! Gold—uh, *cleaning* rocks everywhere!

PEDRO. Again with this “see.” This thing has brain problems.

EDUARDO. You can pave the streets with *cleaning rocks*.

MEDINA. You say crazy things.

PEDRO. We should shout as we walk. So children won’t be afraid.

MEDINA. Put down the cleaning rock. Babies throw things around. You don’t want to hurt people, do you?

STORYTELLER. He puts the gold down. They walk.

PEDRO. Children! Stay back! We have a smelly, clumsy creature that might throw cleaning rocks!

EDUARDO. So you’ve never had a stranger come here before?

MEDINA. What is “a stranger”?

PEDRO. Strange, stranger, strangest. He is not “a stranger” but “a strangest.” Ha ha ha.

EDUARDO. You’re not married to him, are you?

MEDINA. We’ll be there soon.

EDUARDO. Wait. If no one from outside has ever come here, has anyone here ever wanted to leave?

MEDINA. Why would someone want to leave the world?

EDUARDO. You’ve never wondered if there was something more? Something beyond the world you know?
(*MEDINA is about to answer but is cut off by:*)

PEDRO. Dumb questions. Children, stay back! We have a smelly, clumsy creature that asks dumb questions!

MEDINA. We’re about to meet the elders now. Do what I tell you and there will be no problem.

PEDRO. Unless it opens its mouth.

(The LEADER and the HIGH PRIEST enter.)

STORYTELLER. The Leader and the High Priest, both women, approach.

MEDINA. Beloved Leader, Beloved High Priest, we bring you a curious creature, who has arrived full grown in the world.

LEADER. Let us discover why this creature was created.

MEDINA. Maybe he can tell us, though his brain still needs to grow.

LEADER. Does it have a name?

PEDRO. From The Outside.

EDUARDO. No. I am Eduardo Nunez.

PEDRO. You said "I'm FromTheOutside." Now you say "I'm EduardoNunez." It has brain damage.

EDUARDO. I am Eduardo. I am *from* the outside.

PRIEST. What is The Outside?

EDUARDO. A place...where I didn't really exist. But I was always hoping for something good to happen so that I *could* exist.

PEDRO. He's crazy.

LEADER. Quiet.

EDUARDO. I want to live here in peace. I hope that people who have no eyes will not make fun of me for having only one.

LEADER. Eyes? What is "eyes"?

PEDRO. The sound of lunacy.

MEDINA. No. His brain is new. His brain has growing pains.

EDUARDO. I can explain. I have eyes in my face, the rest of you don't. And I can see.

LEADER. See?

PEDRO. He always says “see.” Like a dumb person says “uh.”

EDUARDO. I’m not dumb. I can do things you can’t. I can help you. I can do things to *improve* your lives.

LEADER. We need no improvement; we have no problems.

PRIEST. Except you.

EDUARDO. You have to understand—

PRIEST. What?!

LEADER. You tell us what we have to do?

MEDINA. He means no harm.

EDUARDO. I have a power you don’t, because of my eyes.

LEADER. Let’s feel your power.

PRIEST. No. It could be carrying disease. It could *be* a disease.

STORYTELLER. The Leader feels Eduardo’s face and eyes.

LEADER. It has bulges in its face that we don’t have.

EDUARDO. “Eyes.”

STORYTELLER. The High Priest feels Eduardo’s eyes.

PRIEST. They feel like tumors.

EDUARDO. No. My eyes let me do great things that you can’t.

LEADER. What things?

EDUARDO. I haven’t touched you. But I can tell you how tall you are. You are eleven hands high.

LEADER. Everyone knows that.

EDUARDO. You, the advisor, priest, whatever you are, you’re ten hands high. And you, the guy with bad breath, you’re almost twelve hands high. And you, the only person who’s been kind to me, what’s your name?

PEDRO. Don't tell him, Medina.

EDUARDO. Medina is eleven hands high. There, I've showed you some of my power.

LEADER. Everyone knows how tall someone is. From where their voice is coming from. You are two fingers less than twelve hands high. (*PEDRO laughs.*)

EDUARDO. I know something that none of you know. Medina is beautiful. (*They laugh.*)

PEDRO. What a fool. Cleaning rocks valuable, Medina beautiful.

EDUARDO. Medina is very beautiful.

LEADER. My daughter was chosen to be the future leader because she is *not* beautiful. So she is not distracted by love.

EDUARDO. You lack the ability to know what I can see.

PRIEST. Heresy! These bulges infect his brain!

MEDINA. Stop. Leader and High Priest, Eduardo did not know he was offending you. He has a newborn brain. He has not yet learned The Truth.

LEADER. True. So we will teach him now. Listen and learn The Truth, newborn.

(A ritual begins with the LEADER, MEDINA and PEDRO humming as one to symbolize the unity of the village. The PRIEST then starts with the recitation. After each answer by the village, they hum again.)

PRIEST. The world was first an empty hollow in the rocks. Then the Great Spirit created the earth and trees.

ALL. And it was Good.

PRIEST. Then the Great Spirit created the rain so that grains and vegetables would grow from the earth.

ALL. And it was Good.

PRIEST. Then the Great Spirit created the animals whose job it would be to serve human beings.

ALL. And it was good.

PRIEST. Then the Great Spirit created women who brought wisdom and became leaders.

ALL. And it was good.

PRIEST. Then the Great Spirit created men to plow the fields and do the heavy lifting.

ALL. And it was good.

PRIEST. And at last the Great Spirit created angels to remind us to live as they do.

ALL. And it was good.

PRIEST. We are One World singing, like angels, in harmony.

ALL. And it was—

PRIEST. Until now. (*The LEADER, PEDRO and MEDINA gasp.*)