

I Enter the Valley

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CHARACTERS

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Augusto Reál | mid-seventies, has a hulking frame, sometimes clownish looking, looks like he always has dirt underneath his fingernails, might be mistaken for a farmer, has a huge presence and a way of appearing abruptly and yet seeming like he's always been there |
| Magdalena | late-sixties, long haired, graceful, interminably calm, light on her feet |
| Beatriz | mid-forties, deeply common-sensical, generous figure |
| Zuleiya | eighteen, waifish, young, theatrical, a lost soul |
| Henna | mid-seventies, glamorous, worldly |
| Luis | mid- twenties, is consistently either melancholic or in ecstasy, the temperament of a creative soul who is yet to create |

PLACE

A mythical town, largely rural, widely known as the hometown of renowned poet Augusto Reál.

TIME

It is 1989 but in the valley, time has gone very slowly. It feels like it's 1959.

SPACE

A house in the valley.

We see a bedroom upstairs, a kitchen downstairs, a living room and a study in a modestly proportioned upper middle class home full of bric-a-brac. Offstage the house has two bedrooms that we do not see. The real treasure is the garden. A large, well maintained vegetable garden and an orchard with a river running through it. We do not see this either. The house is the center of all the activity.

Downstage, a small bare area where the poetry lessons take place

Author's Notes:

The house need not be imagined literally. Stage space may be used laterally to indicate 'upstairs' and 'downstairs'.

The rhythm of this play is like music. The moments rise and fall somewhat magically and inexplicably, like rain.

DREAMING

Lesson One

LUIS stands downstage in a pool of light. His hair is slicked back, he beams with enthusiasm. He reads to us from a well loved book. It is clear that he has committed most of this to memory.

LUIS

“The communists, the socialists, the anarchists, the conservatives, the fascists, the capitalists (their cheeks smooth to the touch thanks to foreign razors), the anarcho syndacalists, the centralists, the abstentiasts (who wrinkle their noses at voting), the left of centrists, the right of centrists....we were all writing, writing furiously then. I knew them all, I broke bread with them all and by now I’ve gone to most of their funerals. But people are people. We give each other these names, we give our land other names and then we soak the earth in our blood fighting over which way to carve it. As though a name itself gives it life! Our names, our maps, our borders only make what is large small. Look at your small circles...what are they worth? These small circles.... Call it a nation, call it a village, call it a family. Those with the smallest circle cannot widen their hearts. They can’t look up to see the great arc of the sky and if they do....they’ll miss it; their eyes won’t adjust to the majestic circle binding us all.”

From “*Small Poems for The Lost Century*”
Chapter One, page 3

(with reverence, LUIS snaps the book shut)

-by the Master, Augusto Reál

SCENE ONE

Early June

A small, self-contained bedroom. Wooden furniture. An old armoire. Rectangular windows upstage facing the night sky and the vegetable garden outside. An old wooden bedframe and two small side tables.

MAGDALENA sits with her back to us wearing a nightgown, her hair neatly braided down her back. She assiduously applies cold cream to her arms and legs.

AUGUSTO stands by the door. He is a little winded from climbing up the stairs. He walks heavily into the room and begins to take off his shoes. He takes them off one by one, undoing the shoelaces and shaking them out. From each shoe falls a long pile of sand. He observes this delightedly and lets out a happy snort. He casts each shoe away with a flourish to one side of the room.

She looks at him.

He senses her looking and he looks back.

Then, AUGUSTO looks away into the distance.

Small silence

MAGDELENA

What did you do today?

AUGUSTO

Was up to my elbows in apples and my ass in plums.

MAGDALENA

Oh?

AUGUSTO

Purple juice down my fingertips. Soft, dark, jewels popping round my tongue. The sky ripe for plucking! A flat pale blue. If I could, I would've reached right up and grabbed it and put it in my mouth.

MAGDALENA

Were you alone?

AUGUSTO

No! I wanted to be alone but that little..what's his name? Dona's boy. The little one with all uh hair?

MAGDALENA

Alfie?

AUGUSTO

Scamp. Took his shirt off and dragged it in the dirt. I kept yelling. "Put it on you little monkey". He wouldn't. Dragged it around for hours like a flogged cat. Thumb in his mouth. Kept running ahead of me. Couldn't keep up.

MAGDALENA

I'm glad he was out there with you.

AUGUSTO

I wasn't! He pissed me off. But he knew where the plums were. Every last one of them.

MAGDALENA

So I can make jam

AUGUSTO

Jam, pickles, pies, tarts....

MAGDALENA

We'll see.

AUGUSTO

What?

MAGDALENA

We've talked about this.

AUGUSTO

What?

MAGDALENA

We've talked about this Augusto.

AUGUSTO

You've talked about it.

MAGDALENA

Your blood sugar's /not going to go down by itself.

AUGUSTO

What blood sugar?

MAGDALENA

This is your health!

AUGUSTO

Ha!

MAGDALENA

Did you talk to her?

AUGUSTO

To whom?

MAGDALENA

Don't pretend. The nurse. Did you?

AUGUSTO

I don't like the idea, it's suffocating.

You sound just like Henna.

MAGDALENA

I am not like Henna.

AUGUSTO

Henna used to tell me what to eat, when to sit, how to stand when I pee.

MAGDALENA

I don't do that Augusto, it is *not* my way.

I don't stop you from doing anything you want to do..but..

She reaches for his feet and pulls them out. He pretends to reluctantly give them out. She presses his feet. She looks at him.

MAGDALENA

At least talk to her...

He sighs dramatically

AUGUSTO

What's it all about, Magdalena?

MAGDALENA

Oh no.

You always do this!

AUGUSTO

I'm just saying. The summer's coming to an end.

MAGDALENA

It's not that time already is it?

AUGUSTO

It's due at the end of the summer.

Like a gas bill.

It's been so long my most generous publishers are turning on me.

MAGDALENA

They know it doesn't work like that. They know you can't just...that there needs to be time..for it... to..ripen...

AUGUSTO

Like a plum.

MAGDALENA

Like a plum.

She strokes his head.

MAGDALENA

Try to sleep, it'll come, we have time.

And if it doesn't, we'll cut back on our expenses.

AUGUSTO

It's not just about them.

I can't let people down.

MAGDALENA

You're not letting them down. They have your poems. They have your heart.

AUGUSTO

My heart doesn't lift them up on its own. The words have to come.

MAGDALENA

You have to give yourself time...

When the Nobel committee get /together this year

AUGUSTO

Don't talk about them!

MAGDALENA

Why would they keep nominating you if they didn't like you?

AUGUSTO

To torture me.

Every year some rat on the committee thinks it's a fun sport to tease me.

They poke me and prod me like an animal. "Go on! Run Augusto! Run to the podium! Oh no..not this year..not this year...no."

He stops suddenly.

He looks back at her squarely.

AUGUSTO
What's it all about Magdalena?

MAGDALENA
Augusto.

AUGUSTO
This life. What's it all about?

MAGDALENA
Stop it.
You always do this! You always turn our lives into philosophy. The moment something doesn't go your way...
At least see her!

Pause

AUGUSTO
I don't like her.

MAGDALENA
Did she come?
Here to the house?

AUGUSTO
Yes.

MAGDALENA
And?

AUGUSTO
I let her wait. Then she went away.

MAGDALENA
Why?

AUGUSTO
Because.

MAGDALENA
Because what?

AUGUSTO
Just because.

MAGDALENA

Because *what?*

AUGUSTO

Because, I looked out the window and saw her.
She was fat.

MAGDALENA

....

She is not fat.

AUGUSTO

I can't have a fat nurse.
She'll demoralise me.
I'll be the laughing stock. Augusto Reál has a fat nurse!
Do the other one.
My ankles hurt.
Don't look at me like that.

MAGDALENA

My darling. She's very good, she has the best reputation of anyone here. I heard that her own husband had diabetes and she nursed him with her own hands.

AUGUSTO

And? Where is he now? Is he well?

MAGDALENA

Well, I don't know where he is now (I think he passed away?).

AUGUSTO

Oh wonderful.

MAGDALENA

... but the point is that she knows first hand what it's like for us.
Please....

Pause

AUGUSTO

Tell her to come and see me.

MAGDALENA

Thank you, when?

AUGUSTO

Tuesday.

MAGDALENA

I'm happy.

AUGUSTO

Alright alright.

That's enough.

Can we sleep now?

She turns the light off.

They lie in the dark together, momentarily alone in their thoughts.

AUGUSTO

Magdalena.

MAGDALENA

Yes?

AUGUSTO

Am I...fat?

Small silence..but it's still too long for AUGUSTO's liking.

AUGUSTO

Magdalena!!

MAGDALENA

No no, my darling.

AUGUSTO

It's just that..you've always taken care of me..

MAGDALENA

And I always will. But the fact is, you don't listen to me...if we had a professional, maybe you would listen to her.

AUGUSTO

Hm.

MAGDALENA

Augusto?

AUGUSTO

Yes?

MAGDALENA

Did you...did you..write anything today?

AUGUSTO

The sky got light.
I walked outside
The sky got dark.
I sat inside.
The stars came out.
And..

MAGDALENA

And?

AUGUSTO

Nothing.
It's like the sweetness in my blood has died.
Like the inspiration's gone from dark red to pale.
Nothing.

....

MAGDALENA

It'll come my love.
It'll come.

A slow quiet. The night darkens around them. Three or four hours pass. The night swells and deepens.

Then a candle flickers. MAGDALENA stands looking out of the window. The rain is coming down in thin sheets.

MAGDALENA

Augusto! Augusto wake up!

AUGUSTO

Hmmm?

MAGDALENA

There's someone out there.

AUGUSTO

Huh?

MAGDALENA

Augusto WAKE UP!

AUGUSTO

What what? What is it, what?

MAGDALENA

There's someone out there.

AUGUSTO

Where? I don't see anything?

MAGDALENA

Well you have to get up and come here! Where are your glasses? Bring your glasses! Go on put them on.

He lumbers over to a side table and puts his glasses on upside down and goes to the window.

MAGDALENA

You see that? That white...?

AUGUSTO

Oh yes...

Like a petal.

How beautiful.

They stare for a moment at the shape, lost in it.

MAGDALENA snaps out of her reverie.

MAGDALENA

What is that?

AUGUSTO

Huh?

MAGDALENA

Who is that Augusto?

AUGUSTO

I haven't a clue.

Is she real?

I saw a ghost once, remember? I woke up from a nap and there he was, whistling through the trees.

MAGDALENA

That was Dona's boy Alfie wearing a bed sheet.

AUGUSTO

Oh. But I had that premonition the other time!

MAGDALENA

Please. Close your mouth and think. What do we do?

They look out of the window.

AUGUSTO

Perhaps if we go back to bed, she'll leave.

MAGDALENA

We can't leave her there! Will you listen to the wind?

AUGUSTO

We can't open our doors to her. What if she's mad?

MAGDALENA

I don't know what to do!

AUGUSTO

I've spent my life getting rid of mad women Magdalena!

MAGDALENA walks rapidly to the door.

MAGDALENA

I'm going down.

AUGUSTO

You can't go down on your own! What if she's the devil? You'll never recover.

MAGDALENA

Then come with me.

AUGUSTO

I can't do that.

MAGDALENA

Why not?

AUGUSTO

Frightened.

MAGDALENA

I'm going! I'll open the door. If she comes in, fine and if she doesn't...

AUGUSTO

Oh for heavens sake!

MAGDALENA breathes deeply.

MAGDALENA

It's all fine, it's all fine, it's all just fine..

She runs down the stairs and opens the kitchen door. She props it open using the first thing she can find, one of AUGUSTO's heavy books. AUGUSTO comes very slowly down and looks out at the open door. They wait. They wait.

A few seconds pass. Rain water begins to splash in through the open door.

Then, a girl comes dripping in.

She stares at AUGUSTO. They lock eyes. He comes down the stairs.

She comes to him

And falls into his arms

AUGUSTO
Oh my God.

She holds him close.

Suddenly the air changes.

Like the moment autumn turns to winter. Or winter to spring.

AUGUSTO holds the girl. He bends down to smell her hair.

AUGUSTO
Your hair.... it's like music