

Plays for Young Audiences

A PARTNERSHIP OF SEATTLE CHILDREN'S THEATRE AND CHILDREN'S THEATRE COMPANY-MINNEAPOLIS

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Red Red Shoes

By
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Inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's
'The Red Shoes'

Red Red Shoes was originally jointly commissioned and first performed at the Unicorn Theatre for Children and The Place, London, 2001.

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Characters:

- Franvera
- Mother
- Father
- Anna
- Old Lady
- Red Beard
- Doctor

The cast also takes on various roles as villagers, guests, children, soldiers, etc.

Setting:

The play takes place in a country like Britain, or any modern nation, which accepts refugees. The action for the most part takes place in a room, in a medical establishment. It would be truer to say, however, that the play takes place in the head of a traumatized child. The set design should reflect this reality above any other.

Red Red Shoes was originally conceived as dance theatre for a cast of six or seven but could be performed by a much larger group, as it is the people of Franvera's village as 'Cast' who tell the story. Much of the text given to the 'Cast' can be acted or danced, rather than spoken.

CAST: Once upon another country
So very near, so very far away
there lived a girl.
Happy and hopeful
she ran to school,
but home she flew
like a bird, or an angel.
Yes, just like an angel.
It was as if her feet were wings
and could not touch the ground.

MOTHER: Here comes Franvera

FATHER: Hey – stop, stop – did you hand in your math homework?

FRANVERA: Yes.

FATHER: Good. I'd like to know how I did.

FRANVERA: Where are you going?

CAST: He does not answer but blows a whistle at her, the one he uses for football. The one he wears around his neck like a lucky charm.

MOTHER: He won't be long. Now run down to the stop and buy some bread from the old lady. We have people coming tomorrow.

FRANVERA: Tomorrow? What's tomorrow?

MOTHER: Yes, yes. Go, as fast as your legs can carry you.

CAST: There she goes dancing down the village street.
She never stops moving.
Sometimes she dances when she brushes her teeth.
Sometimes she dances when she helps her mother hang out the weekly wash, and some would smile and say –
There goes Franvera.
One day she'll take off
and land in another country.
But some could scowl and say –
Look at that girl, always on the move
doesn't she know these are dark days
and there she is dancing without care in the world.
Oh but she had cares enough.

Cares that hung heavy on her shoulders like a wet coat.
Why was she in trouble with the Math teacher?
Why was her hair so straight?
Why did her thoughts run like mountain goats through the night
and stop her sleeping?
Why were her parents whispering the other night behind closed
doors?
Why does her best friend stop her in the street this very day-
And say-

ANNA: Franvera?

FRANVERA: Anna! What's the matter, what's happened?

ANNA: My father says, I can no longer play at your house.

FRANVERA: Why does he say that?

ANNA: He says there's trouble coming. Everyone's talking about it.
Haven't your parents talked about it?

FRANVERA: Yes, all the time, but they said we should stay friends. They said
for you to come over...

ANNA: I can't. I can't. No anymore.

FRANVERA: Why not?

ANNA: Last night at supper, I said you were my best friend...father slapped
my face, in front of everyone. He said from now on, I can only
speak to my own people. If I see you on the street I have to walk on
the other side. If I don't, he will be angry, like a storm. I can't speak
to you. Never.

FRANVERA: Never?

ANNA: Why don't you just go - leave? This is not your country - that's
what he said.

FRANVERA: If you won't speak to me, then I won't speak to you.

ANNA: Franvera?

FRANVERA: I hate you - I hate you.

CAST: Franvera can hardly believe her own lips. Her friend is running away and there's no time to take the words back.

OLD LADY: Franvera?

FRANVERA: Yes?

OLD LADY: I've never seen you standing so still before. Like a post in the ground.

FRANVERA: My mother would like the bread she ordered.

OLD LADY: Yes, yes. There's no need to rush. I used to rush when I was young. Where did it get me? Nowhere. I'm still living in the same village.

FRANVERA: Always – the same village?

OLD LADY: Oh yes – those were the dark days, the days of my childhood. One day I will tell you, but not now.

FRANVERA: Thanks for the bread.

OLD LADY: It's not free you know. Good. I will see you again tomorrow.

FRANVERA: Tomorrow?

CAST: For the first time in a long time Franvera does not run home. The next day at two o'clock in the afternoon, the sun warm with the promise of summer, many relatives came. Old men with blue rough cheeks and bright neckerchiefs bring guitars and violins. They play all through a lunch of bread, soup and spicy sausage. An their round wives in black headscarves nod their heads and tap their toes in tight black shoes. Franvera dances between them with trays of food and aunties and uncles smile and ask...
What are you dreaming of, hey Franvera?
Will you stay in the village?
So many leave, these days
The young lady should stay and make this country strong.
If they leave what happens to our language?
What happens to our land?
Shush! It's rude to talk of such things at a party.
What are you going to be Franvera, hey?
What are you going to be tomorrow?

When you grow a little taller?

FRANVERA: Tomorrow? What's tomorrow?

CAST: When the eating's done the musicians begin to play a song
Franvera knows. She turns and sees her father take her mother by
the hand and slowly begin to dance.
"Oh beauty, O beauty where I saw your eye
that day when you were passing by,
two or three words I said to you.
Come here, come here to my soul
because without you my life will be empty forever.
Two or three sweet words for the burning heart.
Together with everything else, I gave you my love."

Her mother dances like a gypsy, her hands slowly curving in the air
as if she could spin heavenly cloth out of nothing. Franvera sees
that her mother is a little vain, and her father a little proud, his
head held high and rather stiff. And her love for them goes straight
from her heart to her feet making her toes itch inside her school
shoes. Then there is a loud applause and they laugh and step back
as if it was nothing.

MOTHER: Please now will everyone be quiet for a moment.

CAST: But some of the men have had too much do drink.

MOTHER: Be quiet please – we have a present for Franvera.

CAST: Her father takes her by the hand and leads her forwards, and the
old sausage smelling ladies grin without teeth, cluck their tongues
and pat her head.

FATHER: Twenty years ago we were married. For ten years we dreamt of a
child.

CAST: "You were doing it the wrong way."
The old ladies slap their legs and laugh like hens and mother looks
at Franvera as if to say –

MOTHER: One day the old ones will grow up.

FATHER: And when we had almost given up hope the dream came true.

CAST: Now her father is holding a box

MOTHER: I thought I told you to wrap it up.

CAST: Father does not like to be told off in front of his guests, but today he cannot be angry so he shrugs-

FATHER: You know what kids are like, you give them an expensive present and they play with the box. So this time I thought, "Okay. I'll just give her a box."

CAST: The guests all laugh as Franvera's mother scolds her husband with her dark eyes. All this time Franvera is holding the box and it feels so light, like it must float away if she lets go.

FATHER: Open the box Franvera.

CAST: She opens the box and for a second time that day time is polite and stops its going on and on, as out of the box Franvera lifts a pair of red shoes.

She's aware of the silence that greets this pair of red red shoes. No one here wears red. Brown shoes, black shoes, but never red. Red is not a modest color.

MOTHER: These are not ordinary shoes...

CAST: Explains her Mother to the old guests in brown shoes, black shoes. These are dancing shoes.

FATHER: Franvera is going to be a dancer.

MOTHER: She will dance in the city ballet.

CAST: Now they understand. Dancing shoes. Of course. And lovely too, so soft.

But Franvera does not hear them approve or disapprove, all she can hear is music, that begins slowly, like a wheel being pushed up hill. It reaches the summit then it rolls faster and faster, until she can hardly keep up. So her parents join hands and they dance, three in a ring, as if no one else existed.

ANNA: Franvera?

Last night at supper, I said you were my best friend...father slapped my face, in front of everyone. He said from now on, I can only speak to my own people. If I see you on the street I have to walk on the other side. If I don't, he will be angry, like a storm. I can't speak to you. Never.

FRANVERA: Never?

ANNA: Why don't you just go – leave? This is not your country – that's what he said.

FRANVERA: If you won't speak to me, then I won't speak to you.

ANNA: Franvera?

FRANVERA: I hate you – I hate you.

CAST: Now there is a room, and in the room sits a girl like Franvera. She looks so very like her but different, strange, tired, so tired. It's a strange room without walls, just a bed and somewhere, far away she can hear voices, echoes, whispers.

A ray of sun shines into the room and the girl who has been sitting on the bed staring at nothing in particular, gets down and walks towards it. She lets it fall on her face. Yes it is Franvera, but she doesn't smile, it's as if the sun were cold. She closes her eyes and lets the sun light up her pale cheeks. The whispers fade and in her head she hears faint traces of a gypsy tune, but as the sun fades, so does the music. She looks down at her feet and sees that they are bare. Bare feet, bare feet. The thought seems to panic her and she tries to leap free of any contact with the earth but every time she leaps, she lands, and her feet become barer until at last she runs back to her bed.

Now a man comes into the room. He doesn't even knock. She closes her eyes and pretends to sleep.

She hears him leave the room, but then he's back. She waits. When she feels that he's gone she turns, and sees some paper on the floor and a stack of bright pens.

Why didn't he knock? What right has he to come walking in as if he owned the place? She picks up a piece of paper, so new, so crisp. She listens to the sound it makes as one piece becomes two, three,

four. Soon she is surrounded by paper and it looks just like her room the night her math refused to make itself simple.

Now she hears a new sound, heavy, grumbling, like an engine, a tractor or a tank. A tank? Bare foot she runs across the room her feet on fire, stares out of a naked window. What does she see? Something that makes her run and hide, throwing herself under the bed.

Franvera is under the bed as the soldier comes into the room. He stands by the bed. She stares at his boots, so black, so polished. Where is mother? Where is father? What's happening? The soldier sits on the bed and lights a cigarette. She looks at the back of his boots, so big, so black, so polished.

She draws a breath. The doctor – is he a doctor – comes in humming a tune. He can't see Franvera because she's under the bed. Franvera dares not move because the soldier is there. Why can't the doctor see the soldier? Why doesn't he do something? The doctor is looking now at Franvera. Can he see her? Yes.

DOCTOR: Hello Franvera.

CAST: Franvera points at the soldier's boots.

DOCTOR: What is it? What do you see?

CAST: Franvera does not speak, she cannot speak. She watches the soldier's boots walk across the floor. She cannot see the soldier, she can only see the boots, and these boots are joined now by another pair. And now everywhere she looks there are black boots.

DOCTOR: Tell me what you see?

CAST: She covers her eyes and waits, and waits, and when she opens them the boots have gone to the edges of the edgeless room. The doctor puts out his hand. Perhaps she should bite it hard? But no, what has he done? Nothing. Slowly she crawls out, mouse from a hole. She searches the room, looking for boot prints, but doesn't find any, only some torn pieces of paper.

DOCTOR: It doesn't matter. It's only paper. Here, I've brought you something else. It's a map of your country. Perhaps you can show me the place you were born? A village? A town?

CAST: He puts the map on the floor and she looks down at it. How small her country seems, how far away.

DOCTOR: It's all rivers and mountains.

CAST: She runs her hand over the map as if she might feel the rocks on her skin, but it just feels flat. It's nothing, just a map.

DOCTOR: We can look at it again. Another time.

CAST: Yes, yes, another time. She sits on the bed and feels that it's wet.

DOCTOR: What? Oh. It doesn't matter.

CAST: But it does matter. Of course it matters. Why does he keep saying it doesn't matter? She rips off the sheets and throws them on the floor.

DOCTOR: They can be washed. It's easy

CAST: He goes to pick them up, but she grabs one end and pulls it hard, then she throws it down again. He picks it up. She throws it down. He picks it up, she throws it down. Now they have hold of an end each, and she is glaring at him. Never has she been so angry. If only she could make him disappear, but he won't, he's stubborn. He just stands there like a fool.

DOCTOR: Franvera, your name is all I have. Can you tell me other things?

CAST: The doctor is speaking, his lips are moving, but Franvera doesn't hear him anymore. She can't hear because now she's staring at the white sheet as if seeing one for the first time. And a breath of wind passes right through her, and standing where the doctor stood just a moment ago is her Mother, holding the sheet.

MOTHER: Are you going to help me or not?

CAST: Then she walks across the edgeless room like she was strolling across the back yard at home. It is a ghost? No – it really is her. She hangs up the sheets to dry, singing to herself, but then she stops, looks to the sky. A single beam of sun burns a hold in the cloud and lands in the backyard. Franvera lifts up her face.

FRANVERA: Too much sunshine is bad for the skin.

MOTHER: Who told you that?

FRANVERA: A friend I used to have.

MOTHER: I'm sorry Franvera, about your friend. One day you can be friends again. It's going to rain before noon.

CAST: As she says this the sun goes in behind a cloud and far off there is a roll of thunder.

FRANVERA: Thunder?

MOTHER: No.

FRANVERA: A cloud can be so many things.

MOTHER: Shh... listen.

FRANVERA: First it's a horse, then a cat, or an ice cream.

MOTHER: I can hear something.

FRANVERA: A car?

MOTHER: No. A truck or...

FRANVERA: A storm?

CAST: Now the sound is getting louder. Just like a heavy truck.

MOTHER: Go inside the house.

FRANVERA: But I want to see.

MOTHER: Go inside.

FRANVERA: It came from over there.

MOTHER: Wait here, don't leave the house till I get back.

FRANVERA: Where are you going?

MOTHER: I'll see who's coming. Do as you're told.

CAST: Franvera stands in the yard. Everything is the same as yesterday. Everything is the same. It was on this very spot her parents danced.

ANNA: Franvera.

FRANVERA: I thought you weren't speaking to me.

ANNA: Please listen.

FRANVERA: No, not anymore. Go away.

ANNA: But you have to listen... you have to. Last night soldiers came to see my father. They said they'll come to the village and send away everyone who wasn't born here. He gave them names...

FRANVERA: I was born here.

ANNA: Your parents were not born here. They were born across the border and now they must go back.

FRANVERA: Go back? I don't understand. I'm not going anywhere.

ANNA: But you must go Franvera. You must go now. This country is not your country. I heard them say so.

FRANVERA: Anna?

CAST: Then there is thunder and Franvera runs to her room and hides under her bed. She listens, no it's not thunder. It's bombs... falling near the village. She covers her face. Silence. When she opens her eyes she is staring at the black boots and the soldier is sitting on her bed smoking a cigarette.

She dares not breathe.

But somehow he knows she is there. Now she is dragged out by her hair like a dog from a kennel who has done something terrible but she has done nothing.

SOLDIER: Where's your father?

FRANVERA: He's at school.

SOLDIER: What does he do there?

FRANVERA: He teaches football.

SOLDIER: No. He does not teach football anymore. Do you smell something... something burning? Yes? That's the smell of the school turning to ashes. Your father wasn't there to stop us. Maybe he's gone up into the hills to clean his gun.

FRANVERA: He hasn't got a gun.

SOLDIER: You see... that's the trouble with you people, you don't even know your own parents. You think your father is teaching football, but all the time he is teaching something else. We know. We know.

CAST: Now he's looking round the bedroom. Beneath his feet, torn paper, and for a crazy moment Franvera wishes she had tidied up. But where is mother?

SOLDIER: What are these?

FRANVERA: My shoes.

SOLDIER: Red shoes? What for?

FRANVERA: I'm going to be a dancer.

SOLDIER: Who says?

FRANVERA: Everyone.

SOLDIER: What do they say?

FRANVERA: They say I'm going to dance for my country.

SOLDIER: Put them on. Put on the red shoes. I'm a dancer too. Yes. And when I find your father I am going to dance on his grave. But first it's your turn. Show me. Dance. Dance!

FRANVERA: I can't.

SOLDIER: Why? Are you scared?

FRANVERA: I have no music.

SOLDIER: Music? You want music too? How spoilt you people are, you want everything.. the house... the village... the fields.. the mountains. You want the whole place for yourself. Well, you can't have it. But music? Of course.

CAST: The soldier begins to stamp his big boots on the bedroom floor.

SOLDIER: Now dance.

CAST: So Franvera begins to dance the steps she learnt at school. The steps she danced at her audition for the dancing school in the big city far away where one day she would dance for her country.

Now the soldier is watching her, his eyes moist with the beauty of the dancing girl in the red shoes.

SOLDIER: Stop. Stop! This house.. this room... is not yours. Go away, and never come back.

CAST: The soldier has gone. Her mother has gone. The soldier has gone. Her mother has gone... but the doctor returns pushing a trolley on which there is a computer.

DOCTOR: This is a computer.

CAST: She glares at him.

DOCTOR: Of course, you know what it is.

CAST: She sits on her bed and stares at the doctor.

DOCTOR: I see you're wearing your red shoes again. Why's that, Franvera?

CAST: She cannot answer. She is frozen, even her toes.

DOCTOR: You had a computer once? You had one at school or home? Perhaps you had one like this in your bedroom? On this site are 74,000 names. People like you, from many countries. People who have lost someone. People who are lost, like you.

This is what you do. You type in your own name. F-R-A-N-V-E-R-A. Like so.

CAST: Her toes melt. Franvera walks to the screen and sees her own name.

DOCTOR: Have I spelt it correctly? You need to type in your family name. The name of your town, or village. Then you type in the name of the person you wish to find. You need these names.

CAST: Franvera sits, types out her family name.

DOCTOR: Good.. it's a strong name. Now type out the name of the person you wish to find. Your mother perhaps? You need her name.

CAST: The doctor is speaking, his lips are moving, but Franvera doesn't hear him anymore. He's drifting away... soon he will be out of sight. All she can see now is her mother coming back into the room, her face swollen, her lip bleeding.

MOTHER: What's happened? Are you alright?

FRANVERA: Your face.

MOTHER: Take off the red shoes.

FRANVERA: No.

MOTHER: You must, we're leaving. We have to go. We have two hours.

FRANVERA: I'm not leaving.

MOTHER: In two hours they'll burn the village. Be brave, please, for me. For me. You'll need good walking shoes and warm clothes.

FRANVERA: Where are you going?

MOTHER: Into the mountains, away from the soldiers.

CAST: Outside in the fields there's another explosion. Her bedroom shakes as if it too were afraid.

FRANVERA: What's happening?

MOTHER: They're shelling the fields to make us leave... so we leave.

FRANVERA: What about father?

MOTHER: He's coming... I phoned him.

CAST: Franvera starts to pack her school bag. She empties her books on the floor. What does one take? She can't decide.

FRANVERA: You said this wouldn't happen. You promised.

MOTHER: Put this ring in your bag.

FRANVERA: Why?

MOTHER: Just do as you're told!

CAST: Gloves, scarves, socks. She slips off the red shoes is putting them in her bag.

MOTHER: Don't take them.

FRANVERA: But you gave them to me.

MOTHER: Don't take them!

CAST: She puts them to one side and when her mother isn't looking she puts them in her bag.

Now they are outside and the village is new to her. Smoke fills the air. Soldiers wearing black boots go in and out of houses shouting, sometimes they come out carrying TV sets. So many black boots, and everyone she knows is outside forming a long line leading away from the village.

The old lady who sells bread, the dinner ladies from school. There are no men. Where are the men? Where is father?

The soldier who made her dance is stopping each person and taking things away; papers, earrings, necklaces.

SOLDIER: Gold... Gold... give me your gold. You people like gold, yes?

CAST: Now an old man is limping along behind them and mumbling to himself, like a fool. A soldier sees a young boy in the line. He goes to the same school...

SOLDIER: How old are you?

CAST: Sixteen.

SOLDIER: Take him to the schoolyard... take him. Old ones... women... children. Go go go.

CAST: Suddenly he rips the bag from Franvera's back. He empties it out. He sees the red shoes and throws them aside. Then he sees the ring and grins like a schoolboy.

SOLDIER: Go go go.

CAST: Franvera picks up her things and sees the old man is holding her red shoes. She takes them... and sees his hands. Looks up to his face, and it's her father pretending to be lame and stupid. He's wearing an old coat, covered in muck...

FRANVERA: Father?

MOTHER: Say nothing... nothing.

CAST: Now they are approaching the soldier who made Franvera dance. When he sees her, he smiles like they were old friends, but then he stops smiling and stares at the fool behind.

SOLDIER: Who is this man? Who knows this man? I thought you people knew each other?

MOTHER: He's an idiot, his brain has gone.

SOLDIER: Hey Red Shoes who is this man?

MOTHER: I told you this man is an imbecile. He is nothing, he can't even speak.

SOLDIER: Go go!

CAST: He yells in her face, pushes her aside. Franvera dare not speak. Her mother stares at her, her eyes are saying something.

SOLDIER: Who is he? Who is he?

FRANVERA: I don't know.

SOLDIER: You don't know the village fool? Strange, you who were born here?

CAST: Now the soldier takes his gun...

MOTHER: We don't know him.

CAST: And puts it to her father's head.

FRANVERA: Father!

CAST: She did not mean to say it. It just fell out of her.

SOLDIER: Well done Red Shoes!

FATHER: It's alright Franvera... it's alright.

CAST: His eyes fix on hers and there are years in them of love and worry, of books read together, of scolding's and sweets under pillows. Countless, nameless moments. And there is one moment more. He has taken the whistle from his neck and pressed it into her hands. She stares down at it and only faintly does she hear her mother's cries as her father falls under blows and is gone.

FRANVERA: Father! Father?

CAST: When she wakes it's still dark, but she is no longer in the room. She is back in the forest, with the sound of the forest and the big cold sky that never ends high above her. All around her are people from the village sitting, lying on the forest floor and some are moaning softly and it becomes a strange lament, a sound of sorrow she's never heard before.

RED BEARD: Be quiet. Do you want the soldiers to hear you and come looking?

CAST: The man who speaks is an old soldier with a long woolen coat full of holes, as if he had been shot a hundred times but never killed. He has a beard that is so red it glows in the darkness.

All day they had walked higher and higher into the hills, into the land of the eagle. They walked until their precious belongings became too heavy and were left behind. They walked until their feet ached became blistered and bled. Franvera walked until the village of her growing up became no more than a smudge far below.

Now all she can see is a warm red glow on the valley floor. Her mother woken by old Red Beard joins her and together they watch.

FRANVERA: What is that light?

MOTHER: They're burning the village.

FRANVERA: Our village?

MOTHER: Yes.

FRANVERA: Don't... don't they want it?

MOTHER: They don't want us to have it. I haven't time to explain more. I have to go.

FRANVERA: Go where?

MOTHER: I must find your father... try to... bring him back.

FRANVERA: I'll come with you.

MOTHER: No. I will only be a little time. By daybreak I'll be back, and if I'm not, you must walk with these people. The old lady will take care of you.

CAST: Then come voices from the shadows.

You shouldn't leave your daughter.
What can you do down there?
I heard shots, I saw bodies.
Stay with your daughter.
Come with us.
If your husband's alive he'll meet us at the border.

Franvera sits in the mud and cries. She can't believe what they are saying. The old bread lady pats her head to console her, but she cannot be consoled.

MOTHER: I'll be back soon.

RED BEARD: Don't be foolish... don't you realize what's going on?

MOTHER: Let go of my arm.

CAST: Franvera sees in the light of the moon that Red Beard is angry. His face is twisted like an old piece of wood. His coat is dirty. His beard is burning.

MOTHER: No one touches me. No one.

RED BEARD: We must walk.. all of us, to the border. There we will meet other soldiers who will greet us and say, 'My friends you have been wronged.' They will take back our country for us.

MOTHER: That will be too late for my husband.

RED BEARD: It's already too late.

CAST: Franvera flies at the soldier, her fists drumming on his coat, her nails clawing at his face until she is dragged away.

RED BEARD: Hey... Little Red Shoes... you drew blood. That's good... one day we'll draw blood together. We'll be revenged you and me.

FRANVERA: Go and find him mother. Bring him home to me.

CAST: Franvera's mother does not know what to do, which way to step. Two days before she had danced in celebration, now her finger is naked. Her wedding ring lies cold in the pocket of a soldier. Her heart is an open wound. Her mind unclear.

MOTHER: He was so close... to walking out. So close.

CAST: She stops herself from saying more, but it's too late.

MOTHER: Franvera?

CAST: They look into each other's eyes until Franvera cannot look anymore. There is too much to see. Franvera knows. In her heart she knows, she gave her father to the soldiers. He'd be with them now and mother would not have to go back.

MOTHER: I'll be back by daybreak.

CAST: Then she is gone into the dark, turning back only once. The old soldier with the red beard drinks and falls down in a heavy sleep. His snores, sneak into the bones of the child who cannot sleep, who waits for daybreak.

Now Franvera is back in her room staring at the white paper on the floor, and without knowing why she begins to draw. And in her head she hears the sound her drawing makes, the cries of the people, the commands of the soldiers, the words of guns. And her drawing is a house, and from its pretty windows flames are rising... red, red, red.

Now she turns and sees her drawing larger than any drawing ever seen before. It gets so large, it becomes a wall so that her edgeless room now has one side to its name.

As she stares at her pictures a light rises in the forest, and a bird is cracking open the day with a dry throat. Her mother has not returned and everyone else has gone. Only the soldier with the red beard and the old bread lady are here. Red Beard is still snoring, an empty bottle by his nose.

RED BEARD: Where is everyone?

OLD LADY: Gone!

RED BEARD: Gone? Without me?

OLD LADY: Yes, without you.

RED BEARD: Why are you still here? Are you in love with me? Ha!

OLD LADY: She wouldn't go. She wanted to wait for her mother.

RED BEARD: Bah. You should have woken me.

OLD LADY: Nothing could wake you. You were drunk, you stupid man.

RED BEARD: Drunk? Not me. Drink doesn't affect me.

CAST: He wobbles from tree to tree like a sick goat.

RED BEARD: Stop laughing. Look at the sun... it's nearly noon. Hey Red Shoes... your mother is not coming back. We must go... walk to the border, the three of us, under the stars like... like the three wise camels.

FRANVERA: I'm waiting here for my mother.

RED BEARD: The soldiers weren't pretending you know. Soon they'll search the hills. Anyone left behind will be shot. You must come with us. Hey... tell her.

OLD LADY: Franvera, he's right. We must go now.

FRANVERA: My mother...

OLD LADY: Told you to reach the border... so... besides I'm old, I need your help.

FRANVERA: Mama...!

CAST: Her voice bumps down the mountainside carried on the morning air, and Red Beard catches her from behind, clasps his dirty hand around her mouth.

RED BEARD: It's better to have no voice than to bring death to us all.

CAST: The old bread lady hits him across his back with a stick she's found for walking.

OLD LADY: Leaver her alone. Come child. We'll walk.

CAST: And so they begin to walk. Red Beard with a limp, the old lady slowly, as if every step was painful. The track is uneven, steep and full of stones. For six days and nights they walk until the old lady falls down and cannot walk anymore.

FRANVERA: What is it? What's the matter?
OLD LADY: My feet, my feet.

CAST: Gently Franvera takes off the old ladies' shoes.

RED BEARD: Why have you stopped?

OLD LADY: She has red feet.

RED BEARD: What's a little blood in a time of war? Come we must walk till it gets dark.

OLD LADY: I can't walk anymore.

FRANVERA: Nor can I.

RED BEARD: We have no food left. We must reach the border or starve to death.

OLD LADY: There's always food.

CAST: Now the old lady is on her knees scratching around on the forest floor.

RED BEARD: What are you looking for? A loaf of bread? Hey Red Shoes, look. She's like a big black mole, digging for worms.

FRANVERA: My name is not Red Shoes.

RED BEARD: Yes. I heard the soldier call you by name. He called you Red Shoes. He liked you.

FRANVERA: My name is not Red Shoes.

RED BEARD: Oh yes. You're well-known Red Shoes, dancing down the street, while your country was being overrun.

OLD LADY: Shut your mouth... she's a child. She didn't make the world the way it is.

RED BEARD: What's that?

OLD LADY: It's a root.

FRANVERA: A root?

OLD LADY: A root.

RED BEARD: What do you want us to do with it?

OLD LADY: Wash it, boil it, eat it.

RED BEARD: Oh... yes, wait one second, I will go to the kitchen to get a saucepan. Oh look at this kitchen, I didn't see it before because of all the trees. So many pretty pots and pans. Salt and pepper, and for the 'child' Tomato Ketchup.

OLD LADY: When I'm rested I can light a fire.

RED BEARD: No! If we have a fire we'll be seen from miles around. The soldiers will think we're rebels and come to kill us.

FRANVERA: Why?

RED BEARD: Because they hate us, you stupid girl. Has no one explained it to you?

OLD LADY: Be quiet... you don't talk to my daughter like that.

RED BEARD: She's not your daughter.

OLD LADY: She is now...

RED BEARD: Yes, because her mother was stupid and went back to a burning village.

CAST: Franvera is swifter than a cat, but this time the soldier is ready for her. He catches her arms and laughs as she spits in his eye.

RED BEARD: That's right... now you feel hatred too. That's good... one day you will be able to use it, like a sword, a gun, a bomb.

OLD LADY: Don't listen to him.

RED BEARD: Alright... alright. Your mother was brave. She loved your father and went back for him. It makes no difference... she's not here.

OLD LADY: It's going to be a cold night. We must take the risk of a fire. You can hide the glow with rocks... the rocks will be warm to touch.

RED BEARD: You've done this kind of thing before? Hey, old Mother?

OLD LADY: Yes... when I was a child. But the mountains weren't as steep then.

RED BEARD: Very true. I was a young soldier in those days. Very handsome.

CAST: High in the mountains, they build a fire and surround it with stones to hide the glow. They boil the root in an old tin mug, but it never gets tender. Franvera is hungry and cold. The stones warm her hand, but the warmth is painful and she cries.

OLD LADY: Be reassured Franvera, at this very moment, not far away, over the mountains, there are children like you, boys and girls... watching

television, doing their homework, having a snack before bedtime. All this will return to you, one day.

RED BEARD: Hey Red Shoes, don't listen to the old witch. Why don't you tell her the truth?

OLD LADY: Be quiet.

RED BEARD: Oh yes... there are people, just over the mountains. People like you Red Shoes, watching TV, doing their homework, but they don't care about us no more than we ever cared about them. Hey... I'm trying to educate you.

FRANVERA: You said at the border, there'd be soldiers to help us.

RED BEARD: Yes, the world knows we have been wronged. We will have our revenge.

OLD LADY: Be quiet, you sinful bag of bones. Don't listen... his breath is poisonous.

RED BEARD: I didn't have to stay behind. I could have left you, with little Red Shoes here to die in the hills but no, I stayed because I am a gentleman.

FRANVERA: You stayed because you got drunk and overslept. You stayed because you walk with a limp and can't walk faster than us.

OLD LADY: Hah!

RED BEARD: Hah!

CAST: Red Beard grins and lies down to sleep. Within seconds he is snoring as if he slept in a comfortable bed.

OLD LADY: Let me tell you something about him.

FRANVERA: What?

OLD LADY: How the old demon got a red beard. Once long ago, when this war was young he was caught by enemy soldiers. They stabbed him in the leg and hung him upside down to die. That's why he limps. But he did not die. No... but the blood ran down his leg down his chest and onto his beard. It became red as you see it now. He tried to

wash it clean but he never could. He gave up trying to wash it and became proud of his red beard.

- FRANVERA:** Is that true?
- OLD LADY:** True enough. So... close our ears to his talk. His talk has kept this war going for a thousand years.
- FRANVERA:** I'm so cold.
- OLD LADY:** Give me your bag.
- CAST:** The old bread lady takes out the red shoes.
- OLD LADY:** Put them on.
- FRANVERA:** No... I don't like them anymore.
- OLD LADY:** Put them on.
- FRANVERA:** Why?
- OLD LADY:** Because I'm an old lady, and I deserve some respect for having lived so long. I would like you to dance for me, here in the high woods, like you danced that day for your mother and father.
- FRANVERA:** I can't.... I can't dance anymore.
- OLD LADY:** Did your mother not say that I would look after you? Then dance for me... it will keep you warm.
- FRANVERA:** There's no music.
- OLD LADY:** "There was one a little girl
so sweet and pretty she was
and she loved to dance
oh she loved to dance
so sweet and pretty she was."
- CAST:** The old lady begins to beat out the rhythm of the rhyme with a stick on a stone and Franvera puts on the red shoes and dances just to keep herself warm. As she dances... she becomes tired and her thoughts wander down forbidden paths.

All around the edges of the edgeless wood where the fire's glow cannot reach, she sees black boots... and the rhythm of the rhyme forces them out of the shadows because they too like to dance and they want to dance with her. How can she tell them to go away? All she can do is dance with them. She is exhausted now and the boots are bold treading on her toes and still the old lady knocks the stick upon the stone.

Now the black boots retreat but Franvera doesn't know why until she sees her mother and father dancing together. She rushes to them but they cannot see her. Their eyes are only for each other and they dance as they danced that day so long ago, so long ago.

Franvera sleeps. In the morning when she wakes her bones are icy. A pale ray of sun cuts through the leaves. Slowly she walks toward it and it fades, returns and fades again.

She sees the room she occupies and the paper lying on the floor. She begins to draw the mountain, and then the shape of the old woman who once sold bread in the village, who lies, still as a stone in her black shawl beside the cold fire.

Now she hears a cry and glancing up she sees an eagle floating high above her so very close to heaven It is so calm this bird as if nothing had happened, nothing had changed. The eagle flies in her picture. Now her room has two walls. Her drawings fill the air giving it shapes and memory. For a moment she glides. For a moment she's peaceful. She feels as if she could speak and be as she once was, a child in a village, so very near, so very far away.

Now something crashes through the cold glass air of the mountains. Her heart and feet leap into shocked space. A sound so deep and piercing it hurts her head, and she cowers under the pale sky.

It comes again waking Red Beard.