

PLAYS FOR
New Audiences

A Division of Children's Theatre Company

The Long Way Home

by Charles Way

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Cast:
Old Mother
Dog boy/Andreas
Male Storyteller
Female Storyteller

The storytellers play all other roles:

Kostas and Xenia
Georgios and Callia
Odessa and Darius

NOT LICENSED FOR PRODUCTION

Scene One.

[A pile of leaves.]

ST 1+2 Once
Once upon a time
there was a forest the size of a country.
In a clearing of the forest there was a village
and in the village lived an old woman.
She dressed in black
and wore flat black shoes
and on her head
she wore a scarf dyed with black walnut.
She wasn't as old as some who wear black
and sleep in doorways all day
but neither was she, as people say, a spring chicken.
And that's what people did say.

ST Hey old mother, what do you want to leave for?

ST You're not a spring chicken, you know.

OM I know. I know.

ST You should stay here in the village of your husband.

ST He was a good man.

ST He looked after you well.

ST And when he was young he was quite a lover. Hey?

OM Oh yes - that's what he told me too.

 [The villagers laugh]

ST He was a character.

ST God rest his soul.

ST Stay in the village Old Mother, for that's what they called her.

ST No-one could remember her real name.

ST Stay in the village of your husband.

ST But Old Mother didn't listen. She packed some food into an old knapsack.

ST No, no. A rucksack. What's a knapsack?

ST It's a type of bag.

ST It's too old fashioned.

ST Last time we told this tale, we used the word knapsack.

ST Times have moved on. People don't use the word knapsack anymore.

ST A knapsack is a type of bag that appears in stories of this nature. Rucksacks are for tourists.

ST It's up to you then. I don't mind.

ST You do mind.

ST No.

[Behind them the old woman is caught between a knapsack and a rucksack]

ST She packed some food into - a bag -
and when the night took the village into its big mouth
she slipped away.
And the next day no one noticed that she had gone.
She had become, as people say-

ST "Part of the furniture".

OM That's very nice. Very kind.

ST So in her black shoes and her walnut scarf she left the village
where she had lived the rosy years of her cheeks
and walked into the forest.

ST With her 'bag'.

ST On the road out she passed her husband's grave.

OM Goodbye husband.

ST And her husband replied from the earth.

Jerry Where are you going wife?

OM I'm going home.

Jerry But the forest is your home.

OM I was born by the sea husband. It's time I went back.

Jerry The sea is a loathsome stinking swell
and the people who live by it smell too.

OM That's very nice of you to say.

Jerry You should stay in the village.
If I was alive I'd force you to stay.

OM Yes, I know.

Jerry They will say that Gerasimou couldn't keep a woman anymore.

OM You're dead husband. You don't have to keep a woman anymore.

Jerry My name lives. You betray my name, my family. You bring shame on me
by leaving.

OM Forgive me husband.

Jerry We shared the same bed for thirty years.
You betray my bed by leaving.

OM I just want to go home Gerasimou. It wasn't easy you know always being
the one who came from somewhere else. And during the war - I lay alone.

Jerry Stop whining woman. You belong here in Valsamata and when you die
you should come here and lie next to me.

OM Thank you husband. That's very nice of you.

Jerry How insolent you are. If I was alive I would kiss you with my fist.

OM I know. I know.

Jerry But what can I do - I'm just bones and dust.
OM There's nothing -- nothing you can do. Goodbye husband. Goodbye

Valsamata.

ST For two weeks

ST Maybe three

ST She walked - and the immensity of the forest surprised her.
It was deeper and darker than she remembered.

ST Her feet grew sore
but her heart was light.
Every night she made a careful fire
and no one told her off
or told her what to do
or what to feel,
and she slept for the first time in years -

ST Like a child

ST Beneath the lights of heaven.

[One of the storytellers now approaches and covers her with a blanket.]

ST What are you doing?

ST It's a starry night- she'll be cold.

ST Don't you think she'll wonder where the blanket came from?

ST We can't leave an old woman without a blanket on a night like this.

ST She never had a blanket before.

ST She's older now - her blood is thinner. I worry for her. Perhaps she's too old and won't reach the sea.

ST What are you talking about - she always reaches the sea.

ST Maybe not this time - it's such a long way.

ST Rubbish. You're so busy with the blanket you've forgotten the rope,
which she cannot do without.

ST You're still angry about the knapsack.

ST I am not!

[They place a rope near the old woman.]

ST Old Mother slept on a bed of dry leaves.
She snored like a pig,
and she dreamt of the sea
and in her sleep she sang -

ST [sings] There once was a boy
who came to the sea
his eyes were like pearls
and he spoke softly
saying oh sweet girl
will you please marry me
and we'll swim through the ocean
eternally.

[The sound of the sea has gathered through the song and now stops. Old mother suddenly sits bolt upright.]

OM Who's there? Who's there?
I can hear you breathing.
Or was it me? No I can hear you still
Oh give me a moon to see by.

[The storytellers glance at each other and give her a moon to see by.]

OM Oh. Who's there then?

[We now see a pile of leaves which has been present throughout - move slightly. Old mother picks up a stick.]

OM I have a gun. A big one - with two barrels - at least.

[She pokes the leaves - a growl is heard.]

OM Heaven's above what's this?

[She clears away the leaves and sees a boy, half naked. He may growl but he is frightened.]

OM Why - you're just a boy. That's all you are.
What are you doing here all covered in dirt and leaves?

[The boy barks back.]

OM Don't you bark at me! Why do you cower so?
I won't hurt you. I tell you I won't hurt you.
This isn't a gun - It's a stick. You see.

[She breaks it in half. He whines - and cowers.]

OM My my. What are you scared of?
It's me who should be scared. All alone I was.
Alone and dreaming then I hear you breathing
In the shadows. Fair frightened the life out of me.

Why you are no more than a child really.
What are you doing here?
Where are your parents?
Do you understand me?
Do - you - understand - me?
Your leg is all bloody.
What happened to your leg?
Silence, nothing but silence.
Still I shall talk as if you do understand.
What else can I do?

You're cold. I see.
Take this blanket.

[She stops momentarily and looks at the blanket - the two storytellers hold their breath.]

OM This blanket.

[Old mother shrugs and gives him the blanket.]

OM What's your name?
They call me Old Mother.
OLD MOTHER.

[He growls.]

OM Strange boy. Dog boy. Wait here.

[She fetches a water jug and pours some onto a cloth - then gives him a drink - he drinks it all.]

OM Why don't you finish it? Why leave any for me - hey?
Now I'm going to look at that leg.

This may hurt but we must stop the rot. Leg.

[She wipes the cut clean - he winces in silent pain.]

OM Who did this to you? Hey?
Someone hurt you? Tied you up?
But you escaped - is that right?
Yes it hurts. Brave boy. Is there a village near by?
Are you the idiot of the village? Perhaps you are, every village has an
Idiot. I know, mine had two hundred.

[She laughs and this shocks the boy who cowers again.]

OM See - the sun is rising and I must be on my way.
Now - what to do? What to do now?

[She takes some food from her bag and gives it to him.]

OM There - you stay put - and by and by someone will come along.
You understand? You stay. Stay. Goodbye.

[She leaves. A moment later she returns.]

OM I've had three sons - I don't want anymore. The three I had left and
never came home. Gone they are - and I hope they're happy.
You will stay - stay here. Fortune will feed you.
You cannot come with me. Goodbye.

[She leaves. A moment later she returns.]

OM What would your family think? Hey - if I were to take you off
as you really were a dog. You must have some family.
Hello! Hello - family! Come on then. Come with me.
I will find someone to take you in.
Come. I will not harm you.
I mean to find you a home. Come.
This is ridiculous.
I hate this.

[She sees the rope. The end of it is frayed.]

OM Does this belong to you? I think so - you've bitten right through it.

[He cowers from the rope.]

What choice do you give me?

I can't leave a child here, even one who thinks he's a dog.

[She struggles to tether him around the neck - and he bites her.]

OM

Ow. You - Ooh.

I should leave you - that's what I should do.

Leave you to starve.

But I can't. Come.

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Scene Two.

Sts Old Mother walked on,
 dragging the dog boy behind her.
 After several hours they came to a large clearing in the trees,
 in the centre of which stood a finely made log cabin.
 Outside the house was the man who had built it.
 In his hand he held an axe which gleamed in the morning sun.

OM Good Morning.

Kostas Same to you Old Mother.

OM I was wondering if I might fill my water jug.

Kostas Of course. Xenia. Xenia.

[Enter Xenia, wearing a brown head scarf.]

Kostas We have some visitors who need water.

[Xenia stares at the boy before disappearing with the water jug.]

OM That's a beautiful name. Xenia.

Kostas Have we met before, Old Mother?

OM No, though I came this way once with my husband before the war.

Kostas I was just a lad then - like this one.

OM Oh yes. We must look rather strange.

Kostas Yes.

OM You don't happen to know him do you?

Kostas No.

OM Neither do I.

Kostas Oh.

OM Are you a carpenter?

Kostas Yes.

OM What do you make?

Kostas Fence posts.

OM Well - someone has to I suppose. [Pause] Where would the world be without fence posts, hey?
I found him in the forest beneath some leaves.

[Enter Xenia with a water jug.]

Kostas Xenia. Do you know this boy?

[Xenia shakes her head.]

OM I was hoping you would, so you could return him to his family.
They must be worried.

Kostas No - he's a stranger to us.

OM I don't know how to say this - but - you wouldn't want one would you? A boy?

[Kostas and Xenia look at one another.]

OM I'm on my way to the sea - the village of Emblisi - it has a nice beach - do you know it? No - well it's very small and far away. I can't take him with me - over the mountains. He wouldn't survive the journey.

Kostas Does he have a name?

OM Not yet - but you could name him - if you wish. That would be nice.

[Xenia examines the boy very closely.]

OM I admit he's a strange boy. He seems to have no speech - but who knows - given time.

Kostas He looks wild.

OM Oh no no - he's not wild. Not wolf wild. He's frightened, that's all.

Kostas Is he a simpleton?

OM He seems to think he's a dog. Apart from that - he's perfect. He might be a genius for all I know. Who can tell what may flower from a poor seed.

Kostas He looks strong, don't you think so Xenia?

Xenia Oh yes. I reckon he's strong.

Kostas Maybe he could stay with us a few days - what do you think?

[Xenia is suddenly overcome with feeling and rushes out.]

Kostas Forgive my wife.

OM I do.

Kostas We had a son. He disappeared. He walked into the trees to play -- our backs were only turned for a moment. But he was gone. We searched for days - awful - dreadful days.

OM You never found him? I see, I see.
How long ago was this?

Kostas Last winter. He'd be six now. I carved this likeness of him to remind myself what he looked like. Sometimes I forget - and I feel terrible.

OM He looks like a fine boy.

Kostas And you look tired Old Mother. Will you stop here for the night?

OM Thank you - I will. We will. I am - sorry for you and your wife.

Kostas You're the first person I've spoken to.

OM Sometimes it's easier to speak to a stranger.
Oh - by the way - do you own this blanket?

Kostas No.

OM No. Neither do I. [She shrugs] A gift I suppose. A gift.

ST That night Old Mother woke up as she did every night to empty her bladder - and she overheard the carpenter speaking to his wife.

Kostas The old woman wants to get rid of him.

Xenia She's too old to look after such a boy.

Kostas He's an odd one, but I could do with some help - carrying logs. I could

teach him everything a man teaches his son - if he has wits that is. What do you think?

[Xenia weeps.]

Kostas I think Xenia - this will help you.

Xenia Help me. Help me.

Kostas Why don't you speak to him?

Xenia No. No.

Kostas Don't be afraid Xenia - he's just a boy - like Petrus.

Xenia Like Petrus. Petrus.

[Xenia approaches the boy and gently wakes him.]

Xenia Boy?

Dog Boy B-oy.

Xenia There you can speak. Of course you can. I remember teaching you myself. How you've grown Petrus - how you've grown.

Kostas No, no Xenia - this is not our son.

Xenia Oh Kostas - you foolish man - don't you recognise him?

Kostas You must not confuse yourself anymore Xenia.

Xenia I tell you. [With alarming force] This is my son.
Where have you been Petrus, you naughty child, to run away like that? I have been so angry, and unhappy. How could you hurt us so much?
We've missed you - oh how we've missed you.
Did you run away? Did someone take you?
[Silence]
You shouldn't have gone with them - but perhaps you had no choice. But don't you worry. I will not let you out of my sight again. Not even for a moment. My son. My son.
Here - I made this for you while you were away.

[She gives him a penny whistle made of wood.]

Xenia Blow Petrus blow - like this.

[Dog boy blows the whistle. Kostas although horrified can do nothing as Xenia sings gently.]

Xenia On Monday we have rice with sausages
 On Tuesday potatoes and sausages
 On Wednesday it's egg with sausages
 On Thursday lentils and sausages
 On Friday cabbage with sausages
 And on Saturday and Sunday
 If the weather is fine
 We'll have a little wine with our sausages.

Xenia You must get rid of the old lady.

[Xenia retires to sleep. The carpenter fetches his axe.]

OM Hey dog boy - get up. We're leaving. Get up.

[The carpenter approaches.]

Kostas What are you doing?

OM Forgive me - we must be on our way.

Kostas In the middle of the night?

OM Oh yes - how dark it is.

Kostas You asked if we would take this boy. The answer's yes.

OM I've changed my mind.

Kostas We'll pay you, of course.

OM He's not for sale.

Kostas You don't understand Old Mother, my wife has set her heart on him. If she wakes in the morning and the boy is gone - there's no telling what she'll do.

OM Your wife is sick with grief. I can't leave this boy with her.

Kostas Don't force my hand Old Mother. Name your price or I will bury you where you stand.

OM You must love your wife, very much.

Kostas Name your price.

OM How can I put a price on a boy - a dog boy at that?

Kostas Dog boy?

OM That's my name for him.

Kostas You're a heartless creature. Name your price.

OM Very well. --- Give me your boy - you know. Is that too much to ask? Give me your boy and I will give you my dog boy. If you don't I will force you to carry out your threat to kill me - and then what kind of man would you be? Hey - could you look at yourself in the mirror? No – at least I hope not.

[He gives Old Mother the carving.]

Kostas Now go.

[Kostas reaches out - and Old Mother hands him the rope. Dog boy reaches out to her, but she turns and goes. Kostas ties dog boy secure.]

Kostas Be quiet!

ST Old Mother in her black scarf
and her flat black shoes
walked into the forest.
Before long she came to a tree stump
sat down and began to sing.

[She sings a mother's lament as she creates a puppet from the carved likeness of Petrus.]

OM You do not deserve it,
a bed in the earth is not for you.
You belong in the garden in May
between the apple trees,
blossoms falling gently
the apples in your lap
and carnations round your neck.

[Lights rise on Kostas and Xenia.]

Xenia Oh Petrus - how wonderful it is to have you home again.
Isn't it wonderful husband.

Kostas If you say so Xenia.

Xenia Don't you love our boy?

[Kostas looks at dog boy who barks at his rope.]

Xenia Don't you worry husband, this time I will not let him out of my sight.

[Xenia fetches three bits of rope and ties one to each limb which she fastens to the earth, so that he cannot move. Meanwhile Old Mother continues to carve and sing.]

Xenia Here is some food. Please eat Petrus - if you don't eat you will become as thin as a leaf ----- that falls from a tree.
Look I will put it here - [She lays her brown head scarf down] you like the colour? It's dyed from the heart of a plain tree - pretty - yes?

Kostas I'm going to town Xenia.
I won't be back until tomorrow morning.

Xenia Are you leaving me husband?

Kostas Fence posts don't sell themselves you know. I'll be back tomorrow.

Xenia I don't believe you.

Kostas Believe what you want.

[Kostas goes - Xenia offers some food to dog boy but starts to weep she falls over and cries herself to sleep to the song that Old Mother has been singing. Lights fade to night. The solid bit of branch which Old Mother has been making is now transformed into a beautiful 'dressed' boy - the image of Petrus. Old Mother, manipulates this puppet and approaches the sleeping Xenia.]

OM Mother. Mother are you there?

Xenia Petrus. - Oh my Petrus is it really you?

OM Yes mother. I've come to see you. Are you alright?

Xenia Yes ----- no. Oh Petrus - my heart is beating fast - just to see your face again. Your face.

OM I'm glad to see you mother. Very glad.

Xenia Where, where did you go - what happened to you?

OM I can't remember mother. I can't remember.

Xenia Are you --- at peace.

OM Oh yes mother. Oh yes.

Xenia I've wept so much for you Petrus - my heart has broken.

OM That's why I just had to come and see you - to mend your heart.

Xenia Oh Petrus - just the sight of you -- Why now? What's the matter?

OM Oh mother. I've been so angry.

Xenia Angry? With me? Why Petrus? What's the matter?

OM Who is that other boy outside?

Xenia Oh he is --- he is --

OM Who is he mother?

Xenia I don't know. In truth I don't know.

OM Is he your son too?

Xenia No. I only ever had one son - you Petrus

OM Good, because I don't want to share you with anyone.

Xenia No. No. I don't know what I was thinking. What was I thinking?

OM Tomorrow - let him go. Please mother.

Xenia Yes, yes, of course. Of course.

OM Why are you crying mother?

Xenia Petrus - you cannot forgive me - it's not possible.

OM For what mother?

Xenia For taking my eyes off you ---

OM Mother - look at my face, and hear my voice. What happened was not your fault. You only looked away for a second.

Xenia And you were gone - forever.

OM As long as you still love me, I'm happy. You still love me don't you?

Xenia Of course - you know I do.

OM Then I forgive you.

Xenia You do?

OM And I will love you, always.

Xenia Thank you, Petrus. Thank you.

OM Go back to sleep now - but don't forget - to tell that other boy to go -- to go back to his own mother.

Xenia I will -- I will.

[Xenia falls back to sleep - the old woman places the likeness of Petrus next to her. Lights rise. Xenia wakes and sees the likeness of Petrus, she looks at it and smiles then approaches Dog boy. She unties him. Kostas enters.]

Kostas Xenia? What are you doing? He'll run away.

Xenia Oh husband. How could I do such a thing? Look at him poor creature. How could you let me do such a thing? Tying a boy to the earth. Oh where have I been husband? A terrible place --

Kostas Xenia?

Xenia But I am myself again Kostas. My head is clear. Last night I had the kindest dream. I saw Petrus - he came to me. He forgives us. He does.

[She lets Dog boy go - but holds out the whistle to him. Old Mother stands at the edge of the scene.]

Xenia Give this to the old woman who brought you here - and say - what can you

say? You have no words.

[She gives dog boy her head scarf which is brown - he takes it and goes to Old Mother.]

Xenia Husband.

[They look at the likeness of Petrus together.]

OM So - it seems - dog boy, that I am to be your mother a while longer.

[She holds out her hand for the scarf but he puts it on his own head.]

OM Oh dear, oh dear.

PURCHASE PERUSAL FOR FULL SCRIPT

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