

PLAYS FOR  
**New Audiences**

A Division of Children's Theatre Company

# *Red Red Shoes*

by Charles Way

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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.

NOT LICENSED FOR PRODUCTION

**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.

**PURCHASE PERUSAL FOR FULL SCRIPT**