

The Red Shoes

Characters

Grandmother
Karen
Shoemaker
First Neighbor
Second Neighbor
Third Neighbor
Fourth Neighbor
The Old Soldier
The Coachman
The Forester
The Forester's Son
The Executioner
The Fairy Queen
Moon

Scene 1

Time-morning

Place: The Shoemakers shop

(Grandmother and Karen enter the shop of the Shoemaker)

GRANDMOTHER: This is my little granddaughter Karen, Shoemaker. Please do take her measure for a pair of shoes.

SHOEMAKER: What kind do you wish, madam?

GRANDMOTHER: Morocco, the finest you have, Karen is to wear these shoes to church.

SHOEMAKER: What color do you wish, madam?

GRANDMOTHER: Black.

KAREN: *(Whispering to Shoemaker)* Red

SHOEMAKER: *(Puzzled)* Eh?

GRANDMOTHER: *(Louder)* Black.

KAREN: *(Whispering to Shoemaker)* Red.

SHOEMAKER: Of course, madam, if you say black, black they shall be.

KAREN: The little princess wore red shoes, Grandmother.

SHOEMAKER: (*Nodding*) That is true; I saw them myself.

GRANDMOTHER: Red shoes?

KAREN: (*Nodding*) Of beautiful red morocco. The queen let the princess stand at a window so everyone could see her new shoes.

SHOEMAKER: It is all true, madam.

GRANDMOTHER: No matter; Karen is to have black shoes. (*Taking up a pair of shoes*) Here, this pair suits me exactly.

SHOEMAKER: (*Surprised*) But, madam, those shoes are—

KAREN: (*Interrupting; whispering*) Hush, Shoemaker! Do not tell her. She can't see very well.

GRANDMOTHER: (*Giving shoes to Karen*) Are they of polished leather? They shine as if they were.

KAREN: Yes; they do shine. (*Trying on shoes*) And they just fit me, Grandmother.

GRANDMOTHER: I will take them, Shoemaker.

SHOEMAKER: But, madam—

KAREN: (*Interrupting; whispering*) Hush, Shoemaker! She will never know the difference.

GRANDMOTHER: Here is the money, Shoemaker. Come, Karen.

SHOEMAKER: But, madam—

KAREN: (*Interrupting*) I am ready, Grandmother.

GRANDMOTHER: Good day, Shoemaker.

SHOEMAKER: But, madam—

KAREN: (*Interrupting*) Good day, Shoemaker. (*Grandmother and Karen go*)

Scene II

Time: The next Sunday, after church.

Place: Grandmother's home.

(The Neighbors sit with Grandmother in the spare room because it is Sunday)

FIRST NEIGHBOR: I did not see you at church today, Grandmother.

GRANDMOTHER: I could not go, but I sent little Karen.

SECOND NEIGHBOR: (*Mysteriously*) Oh, yes; we saw her! Everybody saw her!

GRANDMOTHER: (*Proudly*) People do look at her; she is so pretty.

THIRD NEIGHBOR: People didn't look at her face today.

GRANDMOTHER: (*Alarmed*) What do you mean?

THIRD NEIGHBOR: Ask Karen when she returns. We're not the ones to carry tales.

GRANDMOTHER: (*Looking out window*) Here she comes now!

FOURTH NEIGHBOR: Just ask her about the sermon and the hymns!

GRANDMOTHER: (*Proudly*) She will tell me almost every word the pastor said. She is a smart girl—that Karen.

(*Enter Karen*)

KAREN: Well, Grandmother, here I am! Good morning, Neighbors.

NEIGHBORS: (*Coldly*) Good morning, Karen.

GRANDMOTHER: Now tell me about the sermon, Karen. What was the text?

KAREN: (*With confusion; stammering*) The text? It was—it was—Oh, I will tell you all about it by and by, Grandmother. Our neighbors want to talk with you now.

FIRST NEIGHBOR: Oh, no! We would rather hear you tell your Grandmother about the sermon and the music.

GRANDMOTHER: What hymns did they sing, Karen?

KAREN: (*As before*) Hymns? They sang—let me see—they sang—(*She stops in confusion*)

GRANDMOTHER: Why, Karen! Are you ill?

SECOND NEIGHBOR: No, Grandmother, Karen is not ill. She is ashamed. She was not thinking of the beautiful music nor of the sermon this morning. Is that not true, Karen?

KAREN: (*Ashamed*) Yes—

GRANDMOTHER: What is this?

THIRD NEIGHBOR: Tell your Grandmother what you were thinking about in church, Karen.

KAREN: I was thinking about—about—my new shoes.

GRANDMOTHER: A great thing to think about in church—a pair of plain black shoes!

FOURTH NEIGHBOR: She did not wear her black shoes; she wore *red shoes*!

GRANDMOTHER: (*Gasping*) Red shoes—to church?

FIRST NEIGHBOR: (*Nodding*) Everyone was terribly shocked!

GRANDMOTHER: (*Still gasping*) Red shoes to church!

SECOND NEIGHBOR: Even the pastor looked at her shoes!

GRANDMOTHER: (*Indignantly*) Red shoes to church!

THIRD NEIGHBOR: The choir looked! All fixed their eyes on Karen's red shoes.

GRANDMOTHER: It is the most shocking thing I ever heard! Do you hear me, Karen?

KAREN: (*Hanging her head in shame*) Yes, Grandmother.

GRANDMOTHER: You must never, ever, so long as you live, wear red shoes to church again. It is not at all proper. Do you hear me, Karen?

KAREN: (*As before*) Yes, Grandmother.

FOURTH NEIGHBOR: Do you think she should have her Sunday dinner?

GRANDMOTHER: Not one bite! She shall stay in her room all day. Do you hear me, Karen?

KAREN: Yes, Grandmother.

GRANDMOTHER: Thank you for telling me, Neighbors. To think of it! Red shoes to church!

Scene III

Time: The following Sunday, after church

Place: The churchyard

(Grandmother and Karen come from the church. The Old Soldier stands near the church door. He tries to speak to Grandmother, but she does not hear him)

KAREN: Wait a moment, Grandmother! The Old Soldier wants to speak with you.

GRANDMOTHER: *(Turning)* What do you want, Old Soldier?

OLD SOLDIER: I want to dust your shoes, madam.

GRANDMOTHER: That is very good of you. *(Old Soldier dusts her shoes)* Thank you; now I will go to my carriage while you dust Karen's shoes. *(She goes)*

OLD SOLDIER: Stretch out your foot, little Karen. *(Karen thrusts out her foot)* What is this? Red shoes for church?

KAREN: I looked at my old black shoes—

OLD SOLDIER: *(Interrupting)* And then at your new red ones?

KAREN: *(Nodding)* Yes, and then at my black ones again—

OLD SOLDIER: *(Interrupting)* And then put on your red ones!

KAREN: Shh! Grandmother must not know.

OLD SOLDIER: She can't hear, for I am talking through my long red beard.

KAREN: Why is your beard so red, Old Soldier?

OLD SOLDIER: To make more light for my eyes—that I may see without looking.

KAREN: See without looking?

OLD SOLDIER: *(Nodding)* I was not in the church, yet I saw you clearly when you knelt at the altar and raised the golden cup to your lips.

KAREN: *(Surprised)* You saw that?

OLD SOLDIER: *(Nodding)* And more—I saw your thoughts.

KAREN: You saw my thoughts?

OLD SOLDIER: *(Nodding)* It was to you as if your red shoes passed before your eyes in the cup. Am I not right?

KAREN: (*Showing fear*) Yes—

OLD SOLDIER: And I saw by the light of my beard that you forgot to sing the hymns; eh, Karen?

KAREN: Yes—

OLD SOLDIER: And that you forgot to say your prayers; eh, Karen?

KAREN: Yes—

OLD SOLDIER: You were thinking of your red shoes all the time.

KAREN: Yes, Old Soldier.

OLD SOLDIER: (*Holding Karen and stooping until his beard covers her shoes*) Cover and touch and change, my beard! Cover and touch and change!

KAREN: What are you doing? Let me go!

OLD SOLDIER: (*Holding her firmly*) I am turning your red shoes into dancing shoes!

KAREN: I am afraid of you! Let me go!

OLD SOLDIER: (*Slapping soles of her shoes with hand*) Now I have made them stick fast to your feet!

KAREN: (*Calling*) Grandmother! Grandmother!

OLD SOLDIER: Now you may go! Ha, ha!

KAREN: Why! I am dancing! I can't stop! Grandmother! Grandmother!

GRANDMOTHER: What is this? Mercy on me! She is dancing down the street! Run after her, Coachman! Quick! Stop her!

COACHMAN: (*Running after Karen*) Stop, Mistress Karen! I'm after you!

OLD SOLDIER: Ha, ha, ha! You will never catch her!

GRANDMOTHER: (*Calling after Coachman*) There she goes around the corner!

COACHMAN: (*Calling off*) I'll get you, Mistress Karen! Just stop a bit!

OLD SOLDIER: Ha, ha, ha! You will never catch her!

GRANDMOTHER: My poor Karen! My poor Karen!

COACHMAN: (*Returning*) I couldn't catch her, madam! She danced right out of the town gate!

GRANDMOTHER: Out of the town gate?

COACHMAN: Yes, madam, and straight for the dark wood.

GRANDMOTHER: We will drive after her! (*Coachman jumps into his seat*)

OLD SOLDIER: Ha, ha, ha! You will never catch her!

GRANDMOTHER: Quick, Coachman, quick! We must catch her before she gets to the dark wood. My poor Karen! My poor Karen!

(*The carriage dashes off*)

Scene IV

Time: Three days later; Evening

Place: The dark woods. A hut is seen among the vines.

(*The Forester and his Son are cutting down a tree*)

KAREN: (*Heard calling off*) Stop me! Stop me!

SON: Heard you that cry?

FORESTER: (*Looking off*) Mercy on us! 't is the dancing girl I told you of!

(*Karen enters; dancing*)

KAREN: Stop me, Forester!

FORESTER: No, no! I dare not!

KAREN: (*To Son*) Stop me, I pray you! Three days have I danced! I can endure it no longer!

SON: (*To Forester*) Come, let us help her!

FORESTER: Do not touch her! She is bewitched!

KAREN: 'T is my shoes are bewitched—not I!

SON: I say, little maid, pull of your shoes!

KAREN: They will not come off. See! (*She pulls at her shoes*)

SON: (*Starting towards Karen*) I'll get them off, bewitched or not bewitched!

FORESTER: (*Seizing Son*) Would you get yourself into trouble? Come home with me! (*Forester runs from wood with Son. The Moon arises suddenly in a fir tree*)

KAREN: Oh, Moon, see how I dance below you! Pray tell me how to break this spell!

MOON: Ha, ha, ha! (*The Moon changes into the red beard of the Old Soldier*)

OLD SOLDIER: My beard makes moonlight for me that I may watch you dance.

KAREN: Mercy, Old Soldier! I pray you break your spell!

OLD SOLDIER: You forgot to say the prayers! You thought only of your red shoes!

KAREN: I will go barefoot to church!

OLD SOLDIER: You whispered "red" to the Shoemaker!

KAREN: I will never deceive my dear Grandmother again! Have pity!

OLD SOLDIER: You shall dance in your red shoes till you are pale and cold! By night and by day you shall dance; in sunshine and in rain; in snow and in sleet. Over highways and byways shall you dance; in dark swamps and on mountain tops. You shall go on dancing, dancing, dancing, forever and ever! (*He disappears*)

KAREN: I cannot dance on forever! I cannot! I cannot! (*Weeping; Pause*) Well, I know a way to break the spell, and I'll do it! (*Crossing to the hut of the Executioner; Knocking*) Come out! Come out!

EXECUTIONER: (*From within the hut*) Come in!

KAREN: I cannot come in; I must dance.

EXECUTIONER: Then I will come out. (*The Executioner comes out from hut*) Well, do you know me?

KAREN: You are the Executioner.

EXECUTIONER: I am the Executioner. I cut off the heads of wicked people with this great ax.

KAREN: Do not strike off my head!

EXECUTIONER: And why not strike off your head, pray?

KAREN: I must have that to repent of my sin. So please do cut off my feet.

EXECUTIONER: It shall be as you say. Thrust out your foot, maid.

(Enter Fairy Queen)

FAIRY QUEEN: Stay, Executioner, stay! I've come to save you, Karen!

KAREN: To save me?

FAIRY QUEEN: Whenever a child repents of a sin, lo, I am there to save.

KAREN: Will you remove this spell from me?

FAIRY QUEEN: Will you give up your red shoes?

KAREN: Gladly! Gladly! I wish I might never see them again!

FAIRY QUEEN: Then dance to me that I may touch you with my wand. *(The Fairy Queen touches Karen's shoes with her wand. The shoes fall off)*

KAREN: Dear Fairy Queen! Dear Fairy Queen! I thank you! I thank you!

FAIRY QUEEN: Look, Karen, your shoes are dancing away! Soon they will be lost to you forever. Shall I not bring them back?

KAREN: No, no! Let them go! Now I am free! Now I can rest!

FAIRY QUEEN: Then come, dear child, I will guide you to your home.