



## **The Young Hunter and the Old Woman of the Woods**

### **Readers Theater Play Script and Performance Notes**

***AUTHORS:** Elaine Lindy & Wendy Lees, **COUNTRY:** Finland, **GENRE:** Folktales*



#### **CHARACTERS**

**NARRATOR**

**OLEN**

**DEER #1**

**Deer #2 - #6 (can be from 2 to 6 actors)**

**OLD WOMAN**

*If there are performance notes, they can be found on the pages following the script*

## Scene 1 – Wooded Area

[**Stage Set:** The stage is divided into two halves, with the wooded area being one half and the Old Woman's House being the other half. (**See Performance Notes** for further suggestions on setting the stage.)]

[In the wooded area there are various trees made from cardboard. (**See Performance Notes** for ideas on making the trees.)]

**NARRATOR:**

Hello, everyone. Here's a folktale from northern Finland. That's above the Arctic Circle, where snow falls nearly all year round. A rugged people live there known as the Saams (pronounce: SAAHMS, rhymes with MOMS). This is a Saam's tale, "The Young Hunter and the Old Woman of the Woods" and it is brought to you by *Stories to Grow by*.

[NARRATOR steps forward.]

[OLEN enters stage and looks around. A pouch is slung over his shoulder and he holds a bow and arrow in aiming position.]

**NARRATOR:**

There he is. A young Saam whose name is Olen (pronounced OH-len). A few days ago Olen went deep into the woods to hunt for deer.

**OLEN:**

(*to Narrator*) Hey, have you seen any deer?

**NARRATOR:**

Deer? Why, no I...

**OLEN:**

(*interrupting, then to the audience*) What about you? Spot any plump deer prancing about? (*waits for a few moments for the audience to respond, and they probably will not*) As I thought! This hunting expedition has been a waste of time. There aren't any deer in this forest. Not a single one. (*lowers bow and arrow*)

**NARRATOR:**

Are you sure?

**OLEN:**

Sure, I'm sure. Watch. (*hand to mouth*) Deer! Oh, deer! Come out, come out wherever you are. Stop playing hard to get, and let's get on with this. (*pauses, looks around*) See! No, deer.

**NARRATOR:**

Who taught you how to hunt?

**OLEN:**

Why, I'm self-taught, of course. In fact, I come from a long line of self-taught hunters.

**NARRATOR:**

I'm beginning to see the problem.

**OLEN:**

The problem is that there are absolutely no deer to be found.

[Cluster of DEER peek their heads out on to stage, unseen by OLEN.]

**NARRATOR:**

But there are deer, right behind...

**OLEN:**

None. No deer in any direction.

[DEER sneaks up behind OLEN.]

**NARRATOR:**

If you'd just look...

**OLEN:**

*(sarcastically)* What do you think I've been doing the past three days? Looking, looking, and looking! And if there's one thing I've learned it's that looking for something is no way to find it.

[DEER prance off.]

**NARRATOR:**

Then what IS the best way to find something?

**OLEN:**

I'm not sure. I haven't taught myself that yet. *(stares off to the right)*

**NARRATOR:**

Have you ever considered learning from a successful hunter?

**OLEN:**

No, not really. *(continues to look off to the right, instead of at Narrator)* What I AM considering is seeing what's down that path over there. I see a light. Maybe an inn. *(points off to the right)* Good day!

[OLEN walks about the stage, as if stepping over an overgrown path, then exits.]

**NARRATOR:**

*(calling after Olen)* Good luck with it! *(to audience)* He'll need it.

[NARRATOR exits.]

## Scene 2 - Old Woman's home and Wooded area

[**Stage Set:** The other half of the stage is the OLD WOMAN'S home. A rocking chair represents the exterior of the home. The interior of her home is visible behind the chair- There is a table with a long bench, and a blanket is folded on the bench.]

[OLD WOMAN enters and sits in the rocking chair.]

[OLEN enters and approaches OLD WOMAN.]

**OLEN:**

Hello Madam. Might I trouble you for—

**OLD WOMAN:**

Peur? (pronounced PURR) Peur, is that you?

**OLEN:**

(*surprised*) No, I'm Olen, but did you call me Peur? How odd. My great-grandfather was named Peur.

**OLD WOMAN:**

Was? Has he passed on?

**OLEN:**

Yes. He died a number of years ago, shortly after his wife.

**OLD WOMAN:**

Wife? So Peur was married...? And you are his grandson. (*pause*) Come a little closer.

[OLEN steps forward.]

**OLD WOMAN:**

Closer.

[OLEN steps even closer, still keeping a bit of distance between them.]

**OLD WOMAN:**

Come on, I won't bite. Lost all my teeth years ago. Now, let me get a good look at you.

[OLEN comes to stand right in front the OLD WOMAN. She stands up, puts her hands on either side of his face. Turns his face left, right, up down, then points him directly toward her so that their noses are almost touching.]

**OLD WOMAN:**

*(loudly, in his face)* You look exactly like him. *(coughs)*

**OLEN:**

That's a nasty cough. *(backs away slightly, pulls a canteen out his pack and hands it to Old Woman)* Here. Are you all right? *(takes out a handkerchief and wipes his face)*

[OLD WOMAN drinks and hands the canteen back to OLEN. OLEN sits next to her.]

**OLD WOMAN:**

Yes, I'm fine. Just overcome with memories. Of Peur.

**OLEN:**

So you knew him quite well, then? *(takes a sip of water)* My great-grandfather?

**OLD WOMAN:**

Very well. If you must know, we might have married.

**OLEN:**

*(sputtering cough)* You? And my great-grandfather?

**OLD WOMAN:**

*(nods)* Oh, Peur, what a life he and I could have had! If only...

**OLEN:**

If only what?

**OLD WOMAN:**

If only he would have listened to me on occasion and not been so contrary. Tell me, did he listen to your great-grandmother?

**OLEN:**

She was a woman of few words.

**OLD WOMAN:**

Ah, the perfect match for a man like Peur! Olen, are you like him in that way?

**OLEN:**

I don't think so.

**OLD WOMAN:**

Well, that is a blessing. Because no matter what I said, your great-grandfather would state the opposite. I'd say, "left" and he'd say...

**OLEN:**

Right.

**OLD WOMAN:**

Hot.

**OLEN:**

Cold.

**OLD WOMAN:**

Raining.

**OLEN:**

Snowing.

**OLD WOMAN:**

Exactly! That's just what Peur was like.

**OLEN:**

Although... Snowing's not the opposite of raining. That would be sunny.

**OLD WOMAN:**

Ha, you even argue with yourself! (*notices his bow and arrow*) Are you a hunter?

**OLEN:**

I'd like to be.

**OLD WOMAN:**

What do you mean?

**OLEN:**

For three days I have tried to hunt deer, but this forest has no game in it.

**OLD WOMAN:**

What are you talking about? This forest is loaded with deer!

**OLEN:**

(*bows his head slightly*) With all due respect, my good woman, if there were any deer at all, I'd have found them.

**OLD WOMAN:**

With all due respect, my over-confident young man, isn't it possible you just don't know how to properly hunt? (*stares off to the right in memory*) I remember Peur used to lure deer by singing to them. Then, with the wind at his back, he'd approach, taking aim with his bow and arrow.

**OLEN:**

(*to audience*) Singing! With the wind to my back! I'll try that! I know an old Finnish folk song the deer might like.

[OLEN gets up, unnoticed by OLD WOMAN, pantomimes shooting an arrow, then runs off stage to the right.]

**OLD WOMAN:**

And that's why your great-grandfather...(*looks around*) Olen? (*louder*) Olen?! (*throws her arms up in the air*) Yes, yes, exactly like Peur!

[OLEN sings/chants from off-stage. (**See Performance Notes** for information about the song and the melody.)]

**OLEN:**

Tilly, tally, tilly, tally, tanta.  
Halla, talla, halla, talla, yanta

**OLD WOMAN:**

Ah, the same lovely voice as Peur...

[DEER herd enter stage from the left.]

**OLD WOMAN:**

And here come the deer.

[DEER walk cautiously to center of the stage, lured by OLEN's singing.]

**OLEN:**

Tilly, tally, tilly, tally, tanta.

[DEER very obviously sniff the air and prance away in the direction they came.]

**OLD WOMAN:**

And there they go.

[OLEN sulks back onto stage.]

**OLEN:**

(*to Old Woman*) Perhaps over time your memory of how my great-grandfather used to hunt has grown fuzzy. I did everything you said. And it didn't work.

**OLD WOMAN:**

Of course, it didn't!



**OLEN:**

*(confused)* But you said my great-grandfather—

**OLD WOMAN:**

What I was going to say was that your great-grandfather Peur was a terrible deer hunter!

**OLEN:**

He was? Then what kind of hunting lesson was that?

**OLD WOMAN:**

A lesson about what NOT to do! But you ran off before I was finished. That was just like him, too! He didn't listen to me either. That's why I never married him!

**OLEN:**

*(sits down next to her)* I wouldn't mind hearing what you have to say about hunting.

**OLD WOMAN:**

*(teasing)* Wouldn't you rather just wander around in the forest for days with nothing to show for it but an empty stomach?

[OLEN half-smiles and shakes his head.]

**OLD WOMAN:**

Oh! Speaking of an empty stomach, why don't we start your lesson after supper? How does a nice hot bowl of pea soup sound?

**OLEN:**

It sounds delicious.

**OLD WOMAN:**

My cabin's not much to look at. But I can offer a warm blanket and a floor to sleep on tonight. Beats spending the night on the snow-covered ground.

**OLEN:**

I'd be grateful.

**OLD WOMAN:**

When you're well fed and rested, I will tell you a thing or two about hunting. Then tomorrow you will bring me home a deer for supper. Deal?

**OLEN:**

It's a deal.

[OLEN reaches out to OLD WOMAN. They shake hands, and she leads him inside. She hands him two bowls, which he sets on the table. She pantomimes ladling soup for both of them.]

**OLD WOMAN:**

Now. Here's what your great-grandfather never stopped long enough to hear. When the wind is at a hunter's back, the breeze carries the scent of the hunter straight to the deer's sensitive nose. Make sense?

**OLEN:**

Yes. No wonder the deer go into hiding or run off.

**OLD WOMAN:**

Exactly. And, having not bathed in awhile, your scent is - well, how shall I put this? - pungent (pronounce: PUN-jent).

[OLEN sniffs his armpits and makes a face.]

**OLD WOMAN:**

A bath after supper will take care of that. But to really excel at hunting deer, you can't just smell clean. You must have no scent at all.

**OLEN:**

How is that possible?

**OLD WOMAN:**

Test the direction of the wind to make sure it is blowing in your face. That way the air will carry your scent away. The deer won't be warned of your approach.

**OLEN:**

I get it! Wind to my face so they don't know I'm coming, (*pause*) Then I draw them in with my Finnish Folksong serenade. (*breaks into chant*) Tilly, tally, tilly, tally, tanta—

**OLD WOMAN:**

(interrupting) About that ...don't.

**OLEN:**

That bad?

**OLD WOMAN:**

No, that LOUD. Your voice might lure a deer within earshot, but the deer will stay outside the range of your arrow. For the deer to come closer, you must be absolutely silent.

**OLEN:**

Ah! No scent. A bit of chanting maybe, then silence. No problem. (*pause*) I'm sorry things didn't work out with my great-grandfather.

[OLD WOMAN gets up, begins to clear the table.]

**OLD WOMAN:**

No matter. It's snow from the past winter -- long gone now.

[OLEN lies down on the bench, unnoticed by OLD WOMAN as she uses her apron to wipe the dishes. OLEN falls asleep.]

**OLD WOMAN:**

Besides, it's only because Peur didn't listen to me that you are sitting here today. Now go wash up while I—

[OLD WOMAN notices OLEN is asleep on the bench. She covers him with a folded blanket.]

**OLD WOMAN:**

Good night, Olen. Your bath can wait 'til daybreak. (*exaggerated sniffing*) But no longer than that.

[OLD WOMAN exits stage. NARRATOR enters from other side.]

**NARRATOR:**

Olen arose at dawn the next day and took a much needed bath.

[OLEN gets up and heads to the front door.]

**NARRATOR:**

I said: "Took a much needed bath."

**OLEN:**

Oh, right.

[OLEN turns around and exits.]

[OLD WOMAN enters carrying a bowl and spoon.]

**NARRATOR:**

While he washed up, the Old Woman fixed him a bowl of cloudberry porridge. (That's an orangey fruit like a raspberry or blackberry.)

[OLD WOMAN stirs bowl with spoon, then sets it down on the table]

**NARRATOR:**

Olen returned, freshly bathed, and hungrily gobbled down his breakfast.

[OLEN eats with exaggerated quickness. He holds the bowl up to his face, slurps, and bangs on the bottom of the bowl with his spoon to get every last morsel into his mouth. Then he sets it back down on the table. Stands.]

**OLEN:**

*(to Old Woman)* Wish me luck.

[OLEN picks up his bow and arrow, which he slings over his shoulder]

**OLD WOMAN:**

Funny thing about luck, Olen. The more you learn about something, the luckier you get.

**OLEN:**

I'm feeling lucky.

**OLD WOMAN:**

Now get out there and bring us home a deer.

[OLEN walks out the front door. OLD WOMAN wipes off the table with a cloth. She grabs a broom and sweeps the floor. NARRATOR enters.]

**NARRATOR:**

Olen followed the old woman's advice. Testing the air to see which direction the wind blew.

[OLEN licks his finger, sticks it straight in the air, and nods. He heads away from the house, walking very quietly, almost on tiptoe. DEER #1 wanders onto stage, pauses to sniff the air, then continues across the stage, unaware of OLEN's presence. As DEER #1 walks off stage, OLEN creeps after it. He raises his bow and arrow towards to off-stage deer, and shoots.]

**OLEN:**

Did I get it? I think I got it. *(exits stage, calls loudly from off-stage)* I got it! I got it!

[OLEN (*\*gently\**) pulls DEER #1 by the feet back onto the stage. DEER #1 should keep his or her head up off the stage floor. OLEN goes back to the home of the OLD WOMAN, where she is sweeping. DEER #1 has a comical look of tongue sticking out, hand raised to forehead, to keep the hunting death scene comical. Arrow is tucked into DEER #1's arm to simulate being struck close the heart by an arrow.]

**OLEN:**

*(to Old Woman)* Great-grandmother, look! I did it.

**OLD WOMAN:**

What did you say?

**OLEN:**

Look, a deer!

**OLD WOMAN:**

Yes, I know. But you called me great-grandmother!

**OLEN:**

Oh. I'm sorry.

**OLD WOMAN:**

It's all right. I never had the chance to be anyone's great-grandmother, or grandmother... So to be called that... sounds nice.

**OLEN:**

Well, you feel like family to me. Say, you know what? Come back to my village, and live with my family. Who knows what else I could learn from you!

**OLD WOMAN:**

Ah, such a wonderful offer! But I cannot accept.

**OLEN:**

Why? I'm listening better now.

**OLD WOMAN:**

Then hear this, grandson.

**OLEN:**

Grandson? I like that.

**OLD WOMAN:**

Think of it this way. I'm no different than other aging animals. As they age, they stick close to their nests or caves, or -

**OLEN:**

Or their cabin in the woods?

**OLD WOMAN:**

(*nods*) You see, I am rooted to my home like an old spruce to the frozen winter ground. I cannot be uprooted. Not anymore. My dear man, I must stay.

**OLEN:**

I think I understand.

**OLD WOMAN:**

I'll miss you, Olen.

**OLEN:**

No, you won't.

**OLD WOMAN:**

Oh not again! Disagreeing with everything I say, just like your great-grandfather Peur!

**OLEN:**

I mean, you won't miss me because (*pause*) if you won't come stay with me, I'd like to stay here with you awhile. If that's all right.

**OLD WOMAN:**

Yes, why YES! Very much all right.

**OLEN:**

Good. Then I will stay.

[They hug.]

**OLEN:**

Say, great-grandmother... Do you know how to make Mojakka (pronounce: MOY-a-kah), venison stew?

**OLD WOMAN:**

(*shrugs*) Who doesn't?

**OLEN:**

(*raises hand*) Um, me?

**OLD WOMAN:**

Tell you what. You bring home a deer, and we will feast on my own special recipe for Mojakka.

**OLEN:**

Great! But what I REALLY want to know is... can you can teach me how to cook it?

**OLD WOMAN:**

Let's find out!

[NARRATOR enters.]

**NARRATOR:**

Olen lived with the old woman 'til the end of her days. The lessons and wisdom he learned from her were passed down through his family, from one generation to the next, to his own great-grandchildren, and beyond. (*pauses, then faces the audience directly*) Are you folks still listening? Good, because this is -- The End.

[If you have a curtain, close it now. If you do not, fade the lights. If you have no stage lights, all actors come on stage and bow to the audience.]



## Performance Notes for The Young Hunter and the Old Woman of the Woods

### THREE WAYS THAT STUDENTS AND TEACHERS CAN UTILIZE THIS PLAY

1. Students can read the play aloud while sitting in the classroom. Ask the readers to skip all bracketed stage directions. You may prefer to rotate your actors to give all students a chance to read the speaking parts.
2. Students can perform the play in the classroom. Clear an area that can be used as the stage. Have the audience sit on the floor in front of the stage. Students in the play can make simple costumes and/or sets as described below. When the scene change, the characters "on stage" simply walk to the back of the room where they wait until their next appearance "on stage."
3. Students can perform the play on stage. Refer to the production notes that follow. Ask the actors to enter from the back of the room and move through the audience as they approach the stage.



### COSTUMES

- NARRATOR— Perhaps a nice shirt and slacks, a nice blouse and skirt, or a nice dress.





- OLEN— Brown or tan winter parka, white turtleneck, dark pants, winter boots, and wool fedora-style cap.
- OLD WOMAN— A long dark colored skirt, light color peasant blouse, boots, a simple heavy shawl and an apron.
- DEER— All brown or tan. A headband with small brown or tan ears, and antlers. Ears and antlers can be cut from cardboard and attached to a headband with hot glue.



## PROPS

### Scene 1

- Simple bag for OLEN. This can be a duffle bag, a satchel, or a canvas backpack.
- Bow and arrow set for OLEN (Can be plastic or made from cardboard).

### Scene 2

- Water bottle or canteen for OLEN to give to OLD WOMAN. This can be kept in OLEN'S bag, or if it has a strap it can be worn over the shoulder.
- Handkerchief for OLEN. This can be kept in OLEN'S bag or in his pocket.
- Two plain bowls or large mugs, preferably clay, ceramic, or wooden.
- Two spoons, one for OLD WOMAN and one for OLEN.
- A soup pot for OLD WOMAN.
- A ladle for OLD WOMAN.
- Folded wool or fleece blanket.
- A bowl and a spoon for OLEN'S breakfast. These can be the same bowl and spoon he used for soup.
- Rag for OLD WOMAN to clean table with.
- Broom for OLD WOMAN.



## SETS

The stage is split into two sections, the woods on one side and the Old Woman's House on the other side. If you want to make a backdrop you can paint it to show both locations, or you can just rely set pieces.

- **Scene 1**— The woods, on one side of the stage. You can cut a few trees from tall cardboard boxes and paint them. Leaves can be made from construction paper and glued on. Trees can be propped up against stools, chairs, or milk crates, duct taping or tying them in place.

- **Scene 2**— Old Woman's house/The woods.

For the outside of the house, there is a rocking chair towards the middle of the stage, so that it is close to the house interior, but doesn't block any of the furniture. You can also add other "exterior" items near the rocker, such as a milk jug, a bucket, a butter churn, or small wicker outdoor table.

For the inside of the house, there is a simple table and a long bench (like a picnic bench) on stage. If you do not have a bench, you can put a few chairs together in a row, just as long as the actor playing OLEN can safely lie down across them. There can also be another, small table, on which you can set the soup pot, the ladle, the bowls, the spoons, and the cleaning rag.

For the action that takes place in the woods, use the same space as in Scene 1.

## ADDITIONAL NOTES

**Finnish Folksong** – The character of OLEN sings a folksong during the play. The lyrics are to how English speakers would use words like La-la, Diddly-do. Actor is welcome to make up his or her own tune to the song, but if they would like to use a song for reference, a link to folksong on YouTube has been provided



for reference. The lyrics match roughly to the part of the song that is one minute in.

Feel free to vary the lyrics or use other part of song if preferred.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ySEwZN78nc>)

Song is called: Ievan Polkka (Translation: Eva's Polka)

**About the Saams** — The Saams live largely above the Arctic Circle. This area spans across the Scandinavian countries of Norway, Sweden and Sweden and part of Russia.

They are also known as the Saami, Sami, and Lapps. The name "Lapp" from which Lapland is commonly derived, is believed to have been introduced by the Vikings in the 9th or 10th centuries. The Saams themselves consider the name Lapp derogatory.

While there is no official census of the Saam population, estimates put their numbers at between 80,000 – 135,000 across the Nordic region, of which, approximately 6,000-9,000 reside in Finland.

The Saams are recognized as the indigenous people of Scandinavia.

