

Plays for Young Audiences

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

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The Hundred Dresses

By
Mary Hall Surface

Adapted from the book by
Eleanor Estes

The Hundred Dresses was first presented by Seattle Children's Theatre for the 2007-2008 season.
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Setting:

1938, a small homogeneous town in Connecticut (could be any small, predominantly white middle-class town in America.)

Characters:

Wanda Petronski:

10 - 11 years old, shy, soft-spoken child of a Polish immigrant.

Peggy Thomas:

10 - 11 years old, attractive, most popular girl in school. Very verbal, powerful.

Madeline Reeves:

10 - 11 years old, imaginative. Playful. Peggy's best friend.

Cecile Allen:

10 - 11 years old, well-dressed, well-spoken, but on the giggly side.

Jack Beggles:

10 - 11 years old, fun, smart, motor-boat designer whiz. Dreams big.

Willie Bounce:

10 - 11 years old, a boaster, full of adventure and dares.

Miss Mason:

30s/40s. the classroom teacher. Compassionate, clear-spoken.

Shelly Reeves:

40ish. Madeline's Mom. Kind, industrious in the face of hard times.

Mr. Petronski:

40ish. Wanda's father, a Polish Immigrant, speaks broken English. Hard worker, supports his children.

Jacob Petronski:

13 - 14 years old. Wanda's brother. More hardened to life.

Mr. Svenson:

50s/60s. Lives alone on Boggins Heights. Reclusive. Lonely.

THE HUNDRED DRESSES

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ACT I

I - SCENE ONE

1938. Mid September. Lights up on the crest of a hill, Boggins Heights, above a small town. The porch of a small dilapidated house, belonging to MR. SVENSON, is near the crest. PEGGY and MADDIE, 10/11-year-old best friends, race past the house, holding their breath. Once past, they release their breath dramatically and hurl their strapped school books to the ground.

PEGGY
(*gasp!*) Made it!

MADDIE
I didn't think (*gasp!*) I could hold my breath (*gasp!*) running up a hill!

PEGGY
You have to! (*gasp!*) All the way past old man Svenson's house. Or else he'll come out on his porch!

MADDIE
And then?

PEGGY
He'll send his yellow dog after you or his cat!

MADDIE
(Believing every word.)
His cat?!

PEGGY
That cat can get you sure as look at you.

They cross a bit further away from the house, just to be sure.

PEGGY (cont'd)
It's got yellow eyes and claws the length of two-penny nails. You've never seen it?

MADDIE
I've never been up here.

PEGGY
Why not?

MADDIE
Mother says, "Leave Old Man Svenson to himself."

PEGGY
I wouldn't go near him if you paid me a shiny silver dollar! You just run past him--

They run, then look out and down.

PEGGY (cont'd)
Then you get to the wildflowers!

MADDIE
Best in the whole county.

PEGGY
Only ones in late September. Look across there!

Girls look out from the Heights.

MADDIE
Golly, we're high as birds! Must be why they call this Boggins Heights.

PEGGY
See my house? You can spot it easy!

MADDIE
(Spotting it.)
That big one right there!

PEGGY
Can you see yours or is it too small?

It is too small to see.

MADDIE
It's behind the trees.

PEGGY
There's Cecile's house. And Jack
Beggles's. I think they're in love.

PEGGY makes playful smooching noises.

MADDIE
(Laughing.)
Peggy!

PEGGY
We'll get the biggest bunch of
wildflowers two girls can carry.
All for Miss Mason.

MADDIE
Best teacher in the school!

PEGGY
Best teacher in the world!

PEGGY AND MADDIE
In the universe!!

PEGGY
Right down there-- that's the
meadow-- we can pick autumn asters
and daisies and...

The sound of a wind instrument plays across the Heights. It
is beautiful, but eerie.

MADDIE
What's that?

PEGGY
What?

MADDIE
That! Listen!

They listen.

PEGGY
Sounds spooky.

MADDIE
Like a ghost.

PEGGY

I don't believe in ghosts.

MADDIE

I do.

They really listen.

PEGGY

It's coming from Old Man Svenson's house!

MADDIE

He's got a killer cat and a ghost?

The girls huddle together, PEGGY enjoying being scared, MADDIE not sure.

PEGGY

Some folks say he murdered somebody.

MADDIE

My daddy says he'd never hurt a fly.

PEGGY

My father says he's a good for nothing. That's as good as being a criminal!

They listen again.

PEGGY (cont'd)

(Voice getting spookier.)
It's gho-o-o-o-o-o-st music.

MADDIE turns tentatively toward SVENSON's house.

MADDIE

(Listening, getting lost
in it.)
Floating on the wind...

PEGGY creeps up behind her.

PEGGY

Boo!

MADDIE

(Jumping.)
Ahhhh!

The girls laugh.

MADDIE (cont'd)
Peggy!
(Enjoying her own
reaction.)
Did you see me jump? I went--

MADDIE AND PEGGY
(Doing it again
together.)
"Ahhhh!"

As PEGGY and MADDIE laugh, the music stops as.

MADDIE
Hey. It's gone.

PEGGY
Race you across the ridge!

PEGGY takes off, leaving her books behind.

MADDIE
No fair. Wait up!

MADDIE hurries to the books, then the eerie tune begins again. MADDIE, scared but curious, stops cold.

MADDIE (cont'd)
What is that?

Lights shift as MADDIE slips into fantasy. Wind/Recorder music morphs into eerie underscoring.

MADDIE (cont'd)
"It was a dark, stormy night,"
wrote Maddie, the famous...
kinda... ghost-story writer.

Big clap of fantasy thunder. MADDIE jumps.

MADDIE (cont'd)
"Dark and stormy! The puzzled girl
was sure that something was
there...lurking in the shadows!

The wind howls. Thunder rumbles.

MADDIE (cont'd)
"The deep, dark shadows of Bo-o-o-
ggins Heights. But what?

Thunder claps again. MADDIE, continuing in her best ghost-story teller voice, tries to step toward the house, but she cannot.

MADDIE (cont'd)
"What could be hiding behind the mysterious door? Could it be something... someone... who will haunt her forever!?"

PEGGY (FROM OFF)
Maddie!

LIGHTS return to normal as MADDIE snaps out of her fantasy. All music is gone.

MADDIE
I'm coming.

MADDIE quickly gathers the books and bags. But as she stands to exit, the door on SVENSON's porch slowly opens. A shadow falls across the porch. MADDIE is sure he's coming out to get her.

MADDIE (cont'd)
(Frightened.)
I'm coming!

As MADDIE races away, ten-year-old WANDA steps from the house onto the porch and eagerly looks after the exiting MADDIE. On her recorder, WANDA plays the last phrase of the tune looking toward where MADDIE exited, then turns and walks off a different way.

I - SCENE TWO

In the school yard. One week later (Early October.) WILLIE (10-11) has the attention of fifth graders JACK, PEGGY, CECILE and MADDIE, who holds a ball for Four Square.

PEGGY
Willie Bounce. Would you swear on a stack of Bibles that's true?

WILLIE
Double-dog-triple swear on the grave of my granddaddy.

CECILE
That's not nice to say.

WILLIE

I crept right up onto old man
Svenson's porch, took one of those
rusty cans he keeps lying around,
and put it dead under the rocker on
his chair.

JACK

Then tell, then tell!

WILLIE

I hid by the bayberry tree at the
edge of the road...
(Dramatically.)
and watched.

JACK

Did he come out? Did he come out?

WILLIE

("Opening" the door.)
Cre-e-e-e-ak. The door opened!
Boom!
(Everybody jumps.)
Out he came!

CECILE

Were you scared?

WILLIE

He sat down, easy as you please,
rocked on back and BAM! That can
crumpled up loud as a firecracker.
Old Man Svenson jumped up, white as
a ghost!

JACK

Tell what he did then. Tell what
he did.

WILLIE

That's it.

PEGGY

That's all?

CECILE

He didn't come after you with a
switch?

MADDIE

Or his cat?

WILLIE

He didn't have a chance. I lit out
of there faster than you can say
Dick Tracy.

JACK

(Trying it out, running
around fast.)
Dick Tracy! Dick Tracy!

CECILE giggles at JACK's antics.

PEGGY AND MADDIE

(Rolling her eyes.)
Jack Beggles.

WILLIE

Jack is going up there next.

JACK

(Stopping.)
I am?

PEGGY

We dare you!

WILLIE

Dare you to steal old Man Svenson's
straw hat.

JACK

From his head?

WILLIE

Naw, the one he keeps hanging on
the spike by his door. Bet you
won't go up there and take it.

JACK

Bet I will!

MADDIE

What about the ghost?

PEGGY AND CECILE

There aren't any ghosts!

WILLIE

Oh, I've seen a few up there in my
time.

MADDIE

(To PEGGY and CECILE.)

See!

WILLIE
What do you say?

JACK
Bet you my new Buck Rogers comic
book I'll come back with that hat.

WILLIE
Bet my Flash Gordon you won't.

BOYS
You're on!

The boys shake hands. Then head off to look at their comic books. WANDA, dressed very simply, enters slowly, watching the other children.

CECILE
(Smitten.)
Jack'll do it!

PEGGY
Come on, Cecile.

MADDIE
Four square!

PEGGY heads to the four-square grid and CECILE follows.

PEGGY
King.

CECILE
Queen.

MADDIE
(She's always the
Knight.)
Fine, knight.

MADDIE notices WANDA and the empty fourth place in the game.

PEGGY
Gimme the ball!

MADDIE turns away from WANDA and throws the ball to PEGGY. WANDA crosses and stands in her customary place away from the other kids by the wall.

PEGGY (cont'd)
(Passing the ball.)

No reason except mischief to go up
to Boggins Heights now.

MADDIE
No more wildflowers in October.

PEGGY
Exactly.
(Holding the ball.)
Out of the woods!

All the girls jump outside the four-square grid.

PEGGY (cont'd)
You won't catch me up there till
next spring. That road cakes your
shoes with mud. Bus-stop.

Each girl puts a foot on the bus-stop in the game. WANDA
surreptitiously checks her shoes for mud.

CECILE
Who'd live up there?

PEGGY
Not me.

MADDIE
Me neither.

PEGGY
Corner!

All the girls put a foot on a corner.

PEGGY, CECILE & MADDIE
Safe!

PEGGY
(To CECILE.)
Your foot didn't touch in time.

CECILE
Yes it did.

PEGGY
No it didn't!

MADDIE
Let's just do it again.

PEGGY
Round the world!

PEGGY tosses the ball a little roughly to CECILE, who tosses it to MADDIE but MADDIE misses.

PEGGY (cont'd)
You're out!

CECILE
I want to be King.

PEGGY
Then get me out!

The ball travels toward WANDA, who catches it. WANDA hands the ball back to MADDIE and smiles at her shyly. MADDIE looks at WANDA, almost as if noticing her for the first time ever.

PEGGY (cont'd)
Come on, Maddie, before the bell!

MADDIE jumps back into the game. WANDA remains in her place by the wall.

MADDIE
Line!

GIRLS race to put a foot on a line.

PEGGY, CECILE & MADDIE
Safe!

They pass the ball.

MADDIE
Did you hear Charlie McCarthy on the radio last night?

PEGGY AND CECILE
Yeah.

MADDIE
He's so funny.

CECILE
He's a dummy.

MADDIE
So.

PEGGY
(Holding the ball.)
Round the world peacefully.

They toss the ball gently in a circle.

CECILE

When's Miss Mason going to tell us
about the contest?

PEGGY

She said today and I always believe
her.

MADDIE

You'll win, Peggy.
(PEGGY smiles.)

MADDIE (cont'd)

You're the best artist in the
school!

Bell rings.

WILLIE

First!

WILLIE blasts past everybody into the school. The girls
pick up their things to go into school. WANDA hangs back.
JACK remains buried in his comic book.

MADDIE

Peggy, would you draw me a Charlie
McCarthy?

PEGGY

Sure.

CECILE

Look at that Jack Beggles.

JACK is buried in his reading.

MADDIE

He's going to fall right into a
comic book one day.

PEGGY

Didn't he hear the bell?
(Motioning the girls to
huddle.)

Hey--

PEGGY quickly whispers a plan. They all tumble toward the
school, giggling, leaving JACK lost in his comic book.
WANDA still stands by the wall, watching. The girls turn
back to chant.

PEGGY, CECILE & MADDIE
Last one in's a smelly egg!

JACK still reads, exasperating the girls. PEGGY tries a new tactic.

PEGGY
Look! It's Buck Rogers' Electro-cosmic Spectrometer!

JACK
(Expectantly.)
Where?

The girls shriek with laughter and run into school. JACK looks around.

JACK (cont'd)
Where'd everybody go?

WANDA still stands by the wall, in plain view. JACK looks right through her.

JACK (cont'd)
There's nobody out here.

Bell rings again. JACK gathers up his things quickly and dashes into school. WANDA crosses the playground, stopping in the four-square grid. She stands in a square and moves her foot tentatively on and off a line, imagining she's playing. Then she walks into the school alone.

I - SCENE THREE

The classroom. The same morning. MISS MASON stands at the front of the room. The children stand beside their neatly-rowed desks and recite. WANDA tries to follow along.

ALL
"...shall have a new birth of freedom and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

The children sit. WANDA is always a beat behind.

MISS MASON
I am pleased that all my Room 13 students --

(Walking past WILLIE.)
Almost all -- have memorized the
Gettysburg Address. As Americans,
we should know these words by
heart.

(Acknowledging a raised
hand.)
Peggy.

PEGGY
Abraham Lincoln wrote them. Every
one.

MISS MASON
He did indeed.

JACK raises his hand.

MISS MASON (cont'd)
Yes, Jack?

JACK
I know what President Roosevelt
says by heart. "We have nothing to
fear, but fear itself!"

PEGGY
(Raising her hand.)
He said that when we were babies.

JACK
(Raising his hand.)
He still says it. On the radio.

MISS MASON
But what does it mean?

No hands are raised. The kids try to work that one out.
MADDIE raises her hand.

MISS MASON (cont'd)
Madeline?

MADDIE
That being afraid makes things
worse?

MISS MASON
Very good. Our president knows
that while these are hard times, we
must not be fearful. We must
believe in our nation-- a land of
freedom and opportunity.

MISS MASON gives WANDA a little pat. WANDA doesn't really understand why, but she smiles back.

CECILE
(Raising her hand.)
Miss Mason?

MISS MASON
Yes.

CECILE
Is the drawing contest cancelled because we're in hard times?

MISS MASON
Gracious no. I should have announced it first thing.

WILLIE
Boys do motor boats!

MISS MASON
The boys will design motor boats and girls, you will design dresses. Remember, this is a school-wide contest. You have almost a month to put forth your best effort. Winners will be announced on November 1st. And our principal has picked out medals for the winners.

JACK
Like the Olympics?!

MISS MASON
Yes indeed.

JACK
(Thrilled.)
Swell!

MADDIE raises her hand.

MISS MASON
Madeline?

MADDIE
May we use crayons and pencils?

MISS MASON
Yes and paint and charcoal. Whatever best captures your design. Does everyone understand? Wanda?

WANDA nods.

JACK
Can we start?

MISS MASON
You're to do these drawings at
home.

Some muted grumbles of disappointment.

MISS MASON (cont'd)
That way you will all be surprised!
Now, geography books on your desks.

The children comply.

MISS MASON (cont'd)
We will continue our study of land
and water forms. Madeline, page
sixty-three.

MADDIE
(Standing up to read.)
"Islands are a unique land form.
One characteristic makes an island
different from all other land
forms. Colon. An island is
completely surrounded by water."

MISS MASON
Thank you.
(Calling on her.)
Wanda. Start where Madeline left
off.

WANDA, looking like a deer in the headlights, stands slowly.
She cannot find the place in the book.

MISS MASON (cont'd)
(To MADDIE.)
Show her, please.

MADDIE shows WANDA. WANDA shyly smiles at MADDIE, who
doesn't particularly notice. WANDA begins to read with
difficulty.

WANDA
"Is...lands--"

MISS MASON
"Islands."

WANDA
"Islands can be whole
coun...tries..."

MISS MASON
Go on.

WANDA
"or... they can be very small."

PEGGY and JACK raise their hands to go next, but MISS MASON signals them to put their hands down.

WANDA (cont'd)
"An island is completely...
surrounded... completely."

PEGGY
(Under her breath.)
Maddie read that!

MISS MASON
Follow with your finger.

WANDA
"Islands can be the tip... of an
under...ground vol-ca-no."

WANDA sits back down quickly.

MISS MASON
Thank you, Wanda. Much better.

WILLIE
(Dying to read this
part.)
Can I start with "volcano?"

MISS MASON
"May" I start. Carry on.

WILLIE
(Vividly.)
"A volcano is an opening in the
crust of the earth. Through this
opening or mouth, molten rock,
dust, ash and hot gases are
ejected."

The children are enjoying his description when MR. PETRONSKI steps into the classroom. His clothes reveal that he is poor, but he carries himself with dignity.

WILLIE (cont'd)
"These are known as eruptions!"
This really big volcano blew up all
over ancient Rome--

MISS MASON
Ancient Pompeii. Back to your text-
-

WILLIE
"The largest volcano on the earth
began to form nearly a million
years ago and now covers--

PEGGY
(Drawing MR. PETRONSKI to
MISS MASON's attention.)
Miss Mason.

MISS MASON
Oh. Hello.

MR. PETRONSKI
Sorry I come.

WANDA sits motionless.

MISS MASON
Mr. Petronski, isn't it?

MR. PETRONSKI
(He holds a recorder.)
Yes. I bring music for my Wanda.
Teacher of music say that she
bring. She forget.

MISS MASON
How kind of you. Wanda, you may
come take it from your father. Is
it a flute?

WANDA creeps out of her desk and crosses to her father.

WANDA
(Timidly.)
Re-cor-der flute.

MR. PETRONSKI
(Handing her the
recorder.)
Wandzia przynioslem ci twoj flet.
(Here you are, sweetheart.)

WANDA

Thank you.

MR. PETRONSKI

(Touching her cheek.)

Wandzia, no pokaz pani nauczycielce
jak pięknie grasz. (*Play
beautifully for your teacher.*)

A few giggles from the kids at the funny-sounding language
as WANDA slips back into her desk.

JACK

(Raising his hand.)

Don't we have library on Tuesdays?

MISS MASON

My goodness, look at the time.

MR. PETRONSKI

I go.

MISS MASON

No, stay. Please. Peggy, would you
lead the group down the hall. I'll
be right behind you.

PEGGY

(Happily in charge.)

Yes ma'am.

WILLIE

(Under his breath.)

First!

PEGGY

(Under her breath.)

I'm first. She said!

The kids file out. WANDA starts to exit, following the other
students. She walks right by her father.

MR. PETRONSKI

Wandzia nie pożegnasz się ze mną?
(*Aren't you going to say good-bye?*)

MADDIE has paused looking back over her shoulder at them.

WANDA

Dowidzenia Tata. (*Good-bye, Poppa.*)

WANDA gives her father a quick hug. MADDIE exits quickly.
WANDA follows.

MR. PETRONSKI
(Referring to WANDA.)
Moj aniolku. "My angel."

MISS MASON
(Happy for the
translation.)
Ah. She is a sweet child.
And your son Jacob, in the 8th
grade?...

MR. PETRONSKI
Eight. Yes.

MISS MASON
Why he's made all the difference
helping out before school. The
floors have never been so clean.

MR. PETRONSKI
He work hard. We work hard.

MISS MASON
And we thank you. Well. I should
get to the library. You're welcome
to stay. That's Wanda's desk
there.

MR. PETRONSKI
Thank you. I go soon.

MISS MASON
I'm... pleased to meet you.

MR. PETRONSKI
And me you.

MISS MASON exits. MR. PETRONSKI walks over to WANDA's desk.
He picks up her geography book. He opens it to where she
was reading.

MR. PETRONSKI (cont'd)
"Is-land..."

He flips through the book. Sees something very familiar.

MR. PETRONSKI (cont'd)
"Polska! Po-land..." Poland.

He leaves her book open to the Poland page on her desk. He
exits the classroom.

I - SCENE FOUR

MADDIE's house. One week later. MADDIE is standing on a stool, while her mother sews trim on the bottom of her dress. The radio is playing a tune from the 1930's.

RADIO

"NICE WORK IF YOU CAN GET IT
AND YOU CAN GET IT IF YOU TRY.."

MADDIE

Momma, hurry. Please!

SHELLY

You wanted a new dress.

MADDIE

But what if Peggy gets here? And she sees it. And remembers it!

SHELLY

I'm putting this trim on so she won't.

MADDIE

When can I get a real new dress? Not a hand-me-down.

SHELLY

When your father gets work for more than a week at a time.

MADDIE

His lunch box was gone yesterday.

SHELLY

Because he got work and took it with him.

MADDIE

It's our signal! Lunch box gone:
"Good day." Lunch box on the table:
"Bad."

SHELLY turns off the radio.

SHELLY

You're going to look real pretty in this.

MADDIE

Why didn't Peggy's father lose his job?

SHELLY

Peggy's father is the boss. Bosses usually keep their jobs even in a Depression.

MADDIE

Wish Daddy'd been a boss. Maybe he'll get lucky and the bank will just give him some money!

SHELLY

(Digging through her sewing basket.)

Oh, I need one more piece. I ran out before I got all the way round.

MADDIE

Momma! What if she comes?

SHELLY

Would you rather wear something else today?

MADDIE

No, ma'am.

SHELLY

Then hold still.

(Finding some and sewing quickly.)

Think of all the little girls in town whose mothers can't sew! What kind of shape would they be in on a school morning when they are asking for a new dress--

PEGGY (FROM OFF.)

Maddie, where are you?

MADDIE

Quick!

SHELLY quickly cuts the last thread as MADDIE jumps off the stool.

PEGGY (FROM OFF.)

You were supposed to meet me on the corner!

SHELLY tucks away the sewing basket just as PEGGY enters the room.

PEGGY (cont'd)
Here you are.

SHELLY
Morning, Peggy.

PEGGY
Morning, Mrs. Reeves.
(Taking a good look at
MADDIE.)
Hey, Maddie. That dress--

MADDIE
Yeah?

PEGGY
Isn't it-- ?

SHELLY
Lovely? I'll say it is. It's a
present from Maddie's cousin. Her
second cousin. She lives in
Pennsylvania.

PEGGY
(Clueless.)
Oh.

SHELLY
You girls better hurry.

MADDIE
Can't be late for Miss Mason.

PEGGY
(To MADDIE.)
Guess who I just saw? Ole Man
Svenson trudging up to Boggins
Heights.

MADDIE
By himself?

PEGGY
Who'd walk with him?

SHELLY
You children mind your own business
and let Mr. Svenson mind his.

PEGGY
He doesn't have a business.

SHELLY
Mr. Svenson likes to keep to himself, which is just fine. You leave him be.

PEGGY AND MADDIE
Yes ma'am.

PEGGY
Bye, Mrs. Reeves.

PEGGY is out the door.

SHELLY
Good-bye.

MADDIE
(Smiling.)
Second cousin?

PEGGY (FROM OFF)
Maddie! Come on!

MADDIE and SHELLY share a quick wink and hug.

SHELLY
Go on.

MADDIE rushes off. SHELLY picks up her sewing things, a bit wearily, and exits.

I - SCENE FIVE

In the school yard. The same morning. WANDA and her brother, JAKE, walk quickly toward the school. JAKE never breaks stride, but WANDA, who wears her same dress, hangs back.

WANDA
Jacob?
(He doesn't respond.)
Jake!

JAKE
I'm late. Hurry!

WANDA
I want to wait out here.

JAKE
What for?

WANDA shrugs and gives a shy smile.

JAKE (cont'd)
Suit yourself. Kick the mud off
your shoes before you come in. I
sweep the floors, remember?

WANDA
Przepraszam (*I'm sorry.*)

JAKE flashes her a reproachful look.

WANDA (cont'd)
(Very consciously in
English.)
"Sorry."

JAKE starts to stomp into the school, but then he stops.

JAKE
No walking home without me.

WANDA nods. JAKE enters the school. Then WANDA carefully places a small mirror on the ground. She hears MADDIE and PEGGY approaching. WANDA quickly crosses to her place by the wall as PEGGY and MADDIE enter, arm-in-arm, singing.

PEGGY AND MADDIE
I WROTE A LETTER TO MY GIRL
AND ON THE WAY I DROPPED IT

I DROPPED IT, I DROPPED IT
YES, ON THE WAY I DROPPED IT
A LITTLE GIRL SHE PICKED IT UP
AND TOOK IT --

MADDIE
Stop, Peg. Can you smell it?

PEGGY
What?

MADDIE
Halloween. Smells like Halloween
already!

PEGGY

"October's bright blue weather!"

MADDIE
(Spotting the mirror.)
Look! Something's sparkling.

MADDIE picks up the small mirror from the ground. PEGGY crosses to the four-square grid and improvises hopscotch. WANDA watches the girls intently.

MADDIE (cont'd)
A mirror.

PEGGY
Somebody--
(Reprising the song.)
DROPPED IT, THEY DROPPED IT

MADDIE turns the mirror, catching the sunlight.

MADDIE
Look! You can make rainbows with
the sun. See?

WANDA watches the rainbows and smiles at MADDIE. Neither MADDIE or PEGGY have acknowledged WANDA's presence.

PEGGY
(Not looking at the
rainbows.)
Let's play.

MADDIE
I'm going to put rainbows all over
my dress for the drawing contest.
Big ones, swirly ones--

CECILE enters, wearing a beautiful new crimson dress with cap and purse to match.

PEGGY
(In awe.)
Who do I see! A star from the
pictures?!

MADDIE
Jeepers, it's Greta Garbo!

CECILE
You like it?

PEGGY and MADDIE run over to CECILE. WANDA watches.

PEGGY
Where did you get it?

CECILE
Mother ordered it from a catalogue.
It's Parisian, I'm sure, or at
least from France.

MADDIE
I've never seen a thing so pretty.

CECILE
I've got a new blue one, too.

WANDA slowly edges her way towards the group of girls.

PEGGY
My mother's getting me a Stuart
plaid, but now I want this one!

CECILE
I needed something new for dance
class, too. You see I have my
ballet slippers.

CECILE pulls them from her purse.

PEGGY AND MADDIE
Oooooo.

MADDIE
They're silk!

CECILE
Naturally.

PEGGY
Maddie's dress is new, too.

MADDIE
From Pennsylvania.

As CECILE speaks, WANDA touches PEGGY's elbow and says
something softly.

CECILE
I just don't feel like it's autumn
unless I have a crimson-colored
dress--

PEGGY
(To WANDA.)
What?

CECILE

Did she say something?

All eyes are on WANDA.

WANDA

I got a hundred dresses.

PEGGY

That's what I thought you said.

CECILE

Nobody has a hundred dresses.

WANDA

I have.

CECILE

Where are they then?

WANDA

My closet.

PEGGY

Oh, you don't wear them to school.

WANDA

No... For parties.

PEGGY

You mean you don't have any everyday dresses.

WANDA

I have dresses. All kinds.

MADDIE

(A straight-forward question.)

Then why don't you wear them?

WANDA is silent for a moment and looks, hopefully at MADDIE.

CECILE

A hundred dresses?

WANDA

All lined up in my closet.

PEGGY

I see. She's got a hundred dresses, but she doesn't wear them

to school. She's worried about getting ink or chalk on them.

PEGGY and CECILE burst into laughter. MADDIE fiddles with her mirror.

CECILE
They're all silk, I bet.

WANDA
All silk, all colors.

PEGGY
And velvet, too.

WANDA
Velvet, too. All lined up.

PEGGY
Then please, Princess Wanda of the Hundred Dresses, do go ahead of us into our humble school.

WANDA, buoyed by their attention, crosses past them into the school. As soon as her back is to them, PEGGY and CECILE burst into laughter. WANDA stops, her shoulders droop, and she walks alone into the school.

PEGGY (cont'd)
What a story!

CECILE
She only has one dress. That's obvious. She wears it every day!

PEGGY
Saying she has a hundred dresses. Anybody can tell that's a lie.

CECILE
I'd never lie about my dresses.

PEGGY
Why does she want to lie?

MADDIE
The bell's about to ring, isn't it?

PEGGY
Must be. Here comes Jack Beggles.

JACK comes racing on.

CECILE
Sliding in to school just in the
nick of time!

MADDIE
And it's a--

JACK arrives full speed and slides through the door.

MADDIE, PEGGY AND CECILE
Touchdown!

The girls laugh.

CECILE
That Jack!

CECILE races after JACK into the school. PEGGY and MADDIE
head toward the door just as WANDA comes back out to
retrieve her book which she left when she fled the
playground. WANDA shrinks when she sees the girls.

PEGGY
Hey, Maddie. Watch.
(To WANDA.)
So Wanda. Do tell us more about
your dresses. Your hundred dresses.

WANDA
I have dresses. All kinds.

PEGGY
Tell us about your favorite.

WANDA
(To MADDIE.)
A blue one.

PEGGY
Does it have lace and buttons and
bows??

WANDA
A hundred dresses...

PEGGY bursts into laughter. WANDA crosses quickly back into
the school.

PEGGY
Let's ask her again tomorrow.

MADDIE
What?

PEGGY
We'll wait right here and ask Wanda
Petronski about her dresses. Her
hundred dresses!

MADDIE plays with her mirror.

MADDIE
(Lightly.)
Why?

PEGGY
It's fun!

MADDIE still looks at herself in the mirror. PEGGY steals
the mirror from MADDIE's hand playfully.

PEGGY (cont'd)
Got it!

MADDIE
Hey!

They laugh and run into school.

I - SCENE SIX

MADDIE's house. Two weeks later. MADDIE enters holding a
heavy box. But she is lost in thought, hearing in her mind
over and over the playing of "the hundred dresses game."
(The image of PEGGY teasing and WANDA in her spot by the
wall is recreated on the opposite side of the stage.)

PEGGY (V.O.)
How many dresses?

WANDA (V.O.)
A hundred dresses.
(Explosions of laughter.)
All kinds.

PEGGY (V.O.)
How many dresses?

WANDA (V.O.)
A hundred dresses.
(Explosions of laughter.)
A hundred dresses.

The lines repeat and build until SHELLY enters with a large basket, breaking MADDIE out of her thoughts.

SHELLY
You alright with that?

MADDIE
(Still remembering.)
Huh?

SHELLY
Set it down, honey. It's heavy!

MADDIE
(Shaking the memory off.)
May I never carry another box of
canned vegetables.

SHELLY
You'll be glad to see a green bean
long about January. We're lucky to
get them.

MADDIE
Momma, no lunch box!

SHELLY
It's a good day.

MADDIE
Soon as Daddy gets a job that
lasts, we'll give lots of food back
to the church.

SHELLY
We'll find a way to say thank you.

MADDIE
(Looking at a can.)
Wish they hadn't given us peas.

SHELLY
You get started on your lessons.

MADDIE
Then its--
(One arm becomes a
ventriloquist's puppet
sitting on the other
arm.)
"The Edgar Bergen and Charlie
McCarthy Show" on the radio. Is
Charlie really just a puppet?

SHELLY
You've seen him in the magazines.

MADDIE
Edgar talks. And then Charlie
talks, but it's really Edgar
talking for Charlie--
(Trying it.)
Without moving his lips.

SHELLY
Get your theme book.

MADDIE
(Without moving her
lips.)
OK.

MADDIE takes out her journal as SHELLY sorts the cans.

MADDIE (cont'd)
(Still in ventriloquist
mode.)
I have to write an essay--

SHELLY
Pardon?

MADDIE
An essay--
(Speaking normally.)
On the theme of my choosing.

SHELLY
(Focusing on sorting the
donated clothes.)
Hummm.

MADDIE searches for a pencil. She sits to work.

MADDIE
Momma?

SHELLY
Yes.

MADDIE
Do you think Mrs. Roosevelt has a
hundred dresses?

SHELLY
I doubt anyone has a hundred
dresses.

MADDIE
Maybe a queen or a princess.

SHELLY
Maybe.

MADDIE
What about Shirley Temple? She's a
movie star.

SHELLY
She might.

MADDIE
But nobody around here, even if you
ask them every day for two weeks,
and they always say they do and a
hundred shoes and purses, too, they
couldn't have, right?

SHELLY
Have what?

MADDIE
A hundred dresses!

SHELLY
No honey.

MADDIE
Then why would they say that?

SHELLY
Is this your essay subject?

MADDIE
No, ma'am.

SHELLY
You don't want to miss your show.
(She taps on MADDIE's
theme book.)
I'll be in the kitchen.

SHELLY exits. MADDIE stares into space for a minute, then
gets up and sharpens her pencil. She looks back at her theme
book, as if it is challenging her. She crosses back to it,
tears out a sheet of paper and writes.

MADDIE
Dear Peggy. We've been playing the
hundred dresses game for awhile
now. And I was wondering...

(She crosses out her
words.)
How about we...
(She crosses out.)
What I want to say is...

PEGGY appears in a fantasy light. She holds a puppet of
MADDIE, ala Charlie McCarthy. The dialogue is very 1930's
radio style. PEGGY voices for both of them.

RADIO ANNOUNCER
It's the Peggy Thomas and Maddie
Reeves Show!

PEGGY
Out with it, Maddie. Speak up!

MADDIE PUPPET (PEGGY)
"I got a bone to pick with you,
Peggy."

PEGGY
Oh yeah? Pick your head off.

Canned laughter.

MADDIE PUPPET (PEGGY)
"Aw gee whiz, Peggy. No matter
what I say, you'll get mad!"

PEGGY
Then sew a button on your lip.

Canned laughter.

PEGGY (cont'd)
Aw, come on, kid. Spill the beans.

The puppet turns and looks at MADDIE.

PEGGY (cont'd)
Spill the beans!

MADDIE voices for the puppet now. PEGGY still animates her,
mirroring the movement of the actress-MADDIE.

MADDIE
I want... to play something else
before school besides the hundred
dresses game.

PEGGY
Whatever you say, Maddie.

MADDIE
Really?

PEGGY
Sure.

MADDIE
So we'll stop asking Wanda about those dresses?

PEGGY
Made you uncomfortable has it?

MADDIE
A little.

PEGGY
We haven't made her cry.

MADDIE
I know.

PEGGY
And you just stand there. You never say anything!

MADDIE
I know! But still...

PEGGY
We can play another game if you want.

MADDIE
Could we?

PEGGY
Sure!

MADDIE
That's be swell.

PEGGY
We'll play:

CECILE pops into the spotlight with PEGGY and puppet.

CECILE
"Let's ask Maddie about her dresses."

MADDIE
Not that game--

WILLIE and JACK pop out from behind PEGGY, like a chorus.

WILLIE AND JACK CHORUS
Maddie's "it." Maddie's "it."

MADDIE PUPPET (PEGGY)
"I get my all my dresses from big
boxes in the church basement cause
I'm poor!"

PEGGY
Did you hear that? Maddie's poor.

WILLIE, JACK AND CECILE CHORUS
Maddie's poor!

Canned laughter.

PEGGY
Gather round in the school yard
everybody.

MADDIE PUPPET (PEGGY)
(The puppet waves, so
does MADDIE.)
"Hi everybody!"

RADIO WILLIE
(Like a radio comedian
setting up a joke.)
Whose Dad borrows money from the
bank but can't pay it back?

CHORUS
Maddie's!

RADIO JACK
Whose Mom washes other people's
laundry?

CHORUS
Maddie's!

RADIO JACK
Whose parents had to sell their
car?

RADIO CECILE
And not get a new one??

MADDIE
Maddie's.

CHORUS

Maddie's "it"! Maddie's "it!"

RADIO CECILE

So, Maddie, how many dresses do you
have?

Canned laughter.

MADDIE pulls away from PEGGY et al. and the puppet and the
fantasy disappears. MADDIE holds the note in her hand. She
crumples it up just as SHELLY walks back into the room.

SHELLY

What, didn't you make a good start?

MADDIE

(With authority.)
I've decided it doesn't matter.

SHELLY

Your essay?

MADDIE

I can't do anything about it. And
it can't be that wrong, really.
Peggy's the best liked girl in
school. So there.

SHELLY looks at her, puzzled. MADDIE is amazed her mother is
still staring at her.

MADDIE (cont'd)

I have an essay to write, Mother.

MADDIE opens a book and knuckles down. SHELLY exits,
shaking her head.

I - SCENE SEVEN

Back on Boggins Heights. It is late afternoon, a few days
later. The wind blows, it is chilly, lonely. JACK slowly,
tentatively, creeps towards SVENSON's house. He has a ways
to go. MADDIE lags behind JACK, listening for the ghost
music.

JACK

Do I still have to hold my breath?
Maddie?!

MADDIE
Don't make any noise! I can't
listen.

JACK
I bet ole Svenson comes out if he
just smells you!

MADDIE
Shhh!

JACK takes a few more cautious steps towards SVENSON's porch. MADDIE keeps her distance.

MADDIE (cont'd)
Don't you dare tell a soul I came
up here with you, Jack Beggles.

JACK
Can't do anything without Peggy.

MADDIE
Not true.

JACK
You wanna see me win the bet.

MADDIE
Your bet is silly. I'm...
listening.

JACK
For what? The ghost? There's no
ghost!

A gust of wind blows. SVENSON's house creaks.

MADDIE
There's something.

MADDIE looks around, listening, as JACK inches towards the porch.

JACK
I see it.
(MADDIE jumps.)
I see his hat!

MADDIE
So!

(Listening again.)
The music'll start. Any minute. I
know it.

JACK
I'm getting the hat.

JACK inhales a big breath to hold in, then hurries onto the
porch. MADDIE watches.

MADDIE
Watch out for the cat!

JACK grabs the hat then on his way back down the steps he
sees SVENSEN's dog's dish. He grabs it, too.

MADDIE (cont'd)
What are you doing?! Jack!

JACK
Willie will have to give me five
comic books for this! Let's get
out of here!

MADDIE
Not yet.

JACK
Stay by yourself then.

JACK takes off back down the road.

MADDIE
No!
(Taking off after him.)
Wait for me!

Just then, JAKE and WANDA enter, coming up the road on their
way home from school. Everybody freezes upon seeing one
another.

JACK
(To MADDIE.)
Petronskis!
(To JAKE and WANDA.)
What are you doing up here?

JAKE
What are you?

JACK
Free country.

JAKE
Really? I'm glad you think so.

JACK
We're leaving.

JACK and MADDIE turn to leave.

WANDA
(To MADDIE, quietly.)
Don't.
(Making a shy gesture
toward her house.)
My dresses--

MADDIE stops and looks back at WANDA.

JAKE
Wanda, nie. (No.)
(To JACK.)
You bother Mr. Svenson? Oh, that
makes a little boy feel big.

WANDA
Przestan. Jacob! (Stop it.)

JACK
(Defensive.)
What'd she say? What's she say!

JAKE
(To MADDIE.)
You bother Mr. Svenson, too?

MADDIE
Me? No!

JAKE
You just "watched" while he makes
trouble?

MADDIE
I didn't do anything!

JAKE
You don't belong on Boggins
Heights.

JACK
Yeah? Well, Willie says you don't
belong in our school--

WANDA pulls on her brother's arm.

WANDA

Nie sluchaj. Pamietaj co Tata
powiedzial. (*Don't listen. Remember
what Poppa said.*).

MADDIE turns to cross back down the hill.

JACK

In our town-- anywhere!

MADDIE

Let's race, Jack. Beat ya to the
bottom of the hill--

JACK

That's what Willie says. Not
anywhere! He says.

JAKE

You say that, too?
(To MADDIE.)
And you?

MADDIE

(Still trying to race/get
away.)
Last one there's a...

JAKE

"Chic-ken?"

JACK takes a beat looking at WANDA and JAKE, but then turns
on his heels and takes off down the hill, past MADDIE.
MADDIE turns quickly and goes after him. WANDA follows
MADDIE a few steps then stops.

JAKE (cont'd)

(With irony, turning
toward home.)
America. "Home of the brave."

WANDA

(Not leaving.)
I wish they would stay.

JAKE

Why?! Why in the world?

WANDA shrugs and smiles shyly.

WANDA

I just wish.

JAKE, despite himself, is charmed by his sister.

JAKE
Here you stand and our Tata is
waiting. He doesn't like when his
teacher of reading is late.

WANDA
(Enjoying her command of
an expression.)
He is my "prize pupil!"

JAKE
(Playfully imitating
MADDIE, tagging WANDA.)
Beat you to the house.

JAKE begins to run off. WANDA laughs and follows him. They
exit toward their house on Boggins Heights.

I - SCENE EIGHT

In the school yard. Late October. The next day. PEGGY,
MADDIE and CECILE enter the playground. WANDA crosses into
her spot. JACK comes racing in.

JACK
Where's Willie? Where's Willie
Bounce?!

PEGGY
Not here yet.

JACK
I risk my life and he's not here!

CECILE
Poor Jack.

PEGGY
That's what you get for taking a
dare.

JACK
You should've seen me.

WILLIE enters behind JACK and creeps up on him.

JACK (cont'd)
I went right past Svenson's killer
cat then I got it!

WILLIE
(Grabbing the hat out of
JACK's hand.)
Not for keeps.

JACK
Hey!

WILLIE
Pickle in the middle! Pickle in the
middle!

Amid great laughter, WILLIE tosses the hat to PEGGY. PEGGY
tosses the hat to CECILE, who tosses it back to WILLIE, who
tosses it back to PEGGY in a game of keep-away from JACK.

JACK
(Overlapping.)
Give it! Give it!

PEGGY
(Joining in,
overlapping.)
Pickle in the middle. Pickle in the
middle!

PEGGY throws the hat to MADDIE. MADDIE, who hasn't joined
in, hesitates for a second and JACK grabs it back from her,
roughly, tearing it.

JACK
(Triumphant.)
Hah!

MADDIE
(About the hat.)
You tore it.

WILLIE
(To JACK.)
Pickle!

JACK
Willie Bouncy Ball!

CECILE
(To WILLIE.)
Your name's funny.

WILLIE
(Shooting a look at
WANDA.)
Not funny like some!

WANDA tries to shrink.

PEGGY
Hey Jack, did you hear anything
stra-a-a-nge while you were on
Boggins Heights?

JACK
No. Maddie said I'd hear it--

PEGGY
You went up there?

MADDIE
I--

CECILE
("Gross!")
Mud-dy.

PEGGY
(Incredulously.)
Listening for your ghost music??

PEGGY and CECILE shriek with laughter at MADDIE, who tries
to shrug it off.

WILLIE
Come on, Maddie! That's just
Petronski-onski. Playing that
flute-thing she's got.

MADDIE
What?

WANDA looks away from them.

WILLIE
I've seen her, plenty of times,
sitting on her porch playing away.
She lives right up the hill from
Ole Svenson.

MADDIE
She does?

CECILE
Maddie went looking for Wanda!

WILLIE
(Spookily to MADDIE.)
Maddie's haunted by a Polack who
lives on the haunted heights!

PEGGY
(Giggling.)
By Wanda, the ghost.

MADDIE
(Trying to be playful.)
I'm not.

Laughs all round. MADDIE tries to keep it light with the group, but she is unnerved by the news that "the ghost" is WANDA. WANDA stands by her place by the wall.

JACK
So pay up, Willie. Pay up.

WILLIE
You want help testing out your
motor design? Then give on the
Flash Gordon.

JACK
No fair!

CECILE
I'll help with your design, Jack.

JACK
It's a surprise!

CECILE
You're letting Willie see!

JACK
He's my assistant! Sworn to
secrecy.

WILLIE
(Blackmailing him.)
You see, Cecile, Jack's motor's got
this big--

JACK
OK, OK, no Flash Gordon. But I
still got the hat.
(A trump card.)
And Svenson's old yellow dog dish.

WILLIE

Why you little--

WILLIE tries to grab the dish now. But JACK keeps it away from him.

PEGGY
(Outraged.)
How could you!

CECILE
Poor dog!

BELL rings. Boys rush into school, trailed by CECILE.

WILLIE
First!

CECILE
Jack, you take that dish by...
(Decreeing.)
Friday!
(Smitten.)
That's when you're going to win the
contest!

JACK takes off toward the school.

CECILE (cont'd)
Jack!!

WILLIE, JACK and CECILE disappear into the school. MADDIE is eager to go in, too, but PEGGY stops her.

PEGGY
Maddie, the game!

MADDIE follows PEGGY, but stops short of her usual game spot.

PEGGY (cont'd)
So, Wan-da. Tell us about your
favorite dress today.

WANDA stands silently. Looks away.

PEGGY (cont'd)
What's it look like?

WANDA looks at MADDIE.

PEGGY (cont'd)
Is it lacy or pleated?

WANDA is waiting for MADDIE to say something. But MADDIE is silent.

WANDA
A hundred dresses. All lined up.

PEGGY
Guess she doesn't want to play
today.

MADDIE turns away and heads quickly toward the school.

PEGGY (cont'd)
Wait up, Maddie. Good-bye, Wanda
Pe-tron-ski.

PEGGY giggles and enters the school. MADDIE stops. MADDIE and WANDA look at one another. Then MADDIE quickly follows PEGGY. WANDA stands motionless for a moment. Then she turns and walks away from the school. Lights fade on WANDA.

END OF ACT 1

II - SCENE ONE

The classroom. One week later. MISS MASON stands in front of the class. She looks at her watch. WILLIE and JACK are in their desks. CECILE recites, using a "reporter" voice.

CECILE
"Superman, the brand new comic
book, has taken the world by storm.
And that was today in history:
Friday, November fifteenth,
nineteen hundred and thirty-eight."

WILLIE
She sounds just like the guy in the
newsreels.

CECILE
Miss Mason, may I also add:
(Switching to reporter
voice.)
"Today, Peggy Thomas will be
crowned the girls' winner of the
drawing contest?"