

PLAYS FOR  
**New Audiences**

A Division of Children's Theatre Company

# *Harriet the Spy*

by Leslie Brody

Based on the book by Louise Fitzhugh

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Author's Note:

Harriet's house and school should exist simultaneously and be connected by 'the street', a sort of front yard cum playground for Harriet and her friends.

Several scenes will flow rapidly in and out of these locations and there should always be a fluidity of movement throughout. Also Harriet's 'spy prep area' and her spy route should be set somewhere apart from her daily life.

Characters:

- Harriet
- Mother
- Father
- Cook
- Sport (Simon)
- Janie
- The Boy with Purple Socks
- Beth-Ellen Hansen
- Marion Hawthorne
- Rachel Hennessey
- Carrie Andrews
- Laura Peters
- Pinky Whitehead
- Miss Elson
- Ole Golly
- Mama Dei Santi
- Bruno Dei Santi
- Papa Dei Santi
- Fabio Dei Santi
- Little Joe Curry
- Harrison Withers
- Mrs. Agatha K. Plumber
- Nadine
- Mr. Waldenstein
- Miss Berry

## SCENE ONE

Lights come up on Harriet writing in her notebook. She speaks aloud as she composes, and occasionally scratches out a word to revise. She is dresses for school.

HARRIET            I am a spy with a notebook. I am a spy that writes everything down, every single solitary thing that happens to me. Only nurse Ole Golly understands about my notebook, she says description is good for the soul and clears the brain like a laxative. I am a good spy who has never been caught. (Harriet inspects her work) Yeah! (Back to writing) When I grow up I will be a famous writer and people will bow to me in the streets and shower me with tomato sandwiches and egg creams where ever I go... Do they have tomato sandwiches everywhere? Check on that... And I'll find out everything about everybody and put it all in a book. The book is going to be called Secrets by Harriet M. Welsh. I will also have photographs in it and maybe some medical charts if I can get them.

## SCENE TWO

Lights up in the kitchen. Mother is on the telephone. Father is reading the newspaper over coffee. Cook is standing by the door with Harriet's lunchbox.

COOK                Harriet!

Harriet runs downstairs and grabs her lunchbox.

HARRIET            Tomato sandwich, thank you very much...

COOK                How 'bout pastrami? Bologna? Why does it have to be tomato every day? How 'bout roast beef? Cucumber?

HARRIET            Tomato, tomato tomato!

Sport enters and calls from the street.

SPORT               Harriet!

HARRIET            Good-bye, good-bye, good-bye...

Harriet joins Sport in the street. He throws a football at her.

SPORT            Harriet! Catch! I wanna practice before school.

Harriet hands the ball back to Sport getting a good look at his face. Then opens her notebook.

HARRIET            Me too...

She balances her book on one knee to write.

HARRIET            (Voice/over) Sometimes Sport looks like he's been up all night. He has funny little dry things around his eyes. I worry about him. (Closing her notebook) Writers have to practice too. For instance, if I don't express myself there's a chance I could get permanently stuffed up and become a danger to myself and society.

Jamie enters. Sport throws her the football.

SPORT            Janie! Catch!

Janie catches and returns the ball to Sport.

JANIE            Oh dear, another year of school starting. Another year older and I'm no closer to my goal.

Harriet writes.

HARRIET            (Voice/over) Janie gets stranger every day. Her goal is to be a chemist who can blow up the world.

SPORT            Harriet, catch!

Harriet drops her notebook to catch the football. Janie retrieves the book and hangs on to it for a wicked moment.

HARRIET            Hey! That notebook's private!

Janie hands it over and Harriet dusts it off.

JANIE (To Sport) Harriet must have a hundred notebooks by now.

HARRIET No, I have 14. This is number 15. How could I have 100? I've only been working since I was 8, and I'm only 11. I wouldn't even have this many except at first I wrote so big my spy route took almost the whole book.

The school bell rings and the three friends walk toward their classroom.

SPORT You spy on the same people every day?

HARRIET Yes, this year I have the Dei Santi family, little Joe Curry, Harrison Withers and a new one, Mrs. Agatha K. Plumber.

JANIE I just have one big notebook in my laboratory with around 250 pages full of scientific formulas I've developed... Right now, I have an experiment on a slow boil that my mother thinks may in fact successfully blow up the world. She says it smells like it could blow up the world.

SPORT I don't have notebooks. Ball players don't have to keep notebooks. But I have a ledger...

HARRIET (Taking notes) What's that?

SPORT For financial records. To make sure my father and I have enough money to eat dinner every night.

HARRIET Oh...

SPORT Before I started, sometimes all there was was martinis for him and olives and peanuts for me.

HARRIET (Pen poised to write) What's a martini exactly?

JANIE  $M = \frac{(3.5G + \frac{V}{2})}{4(H_2O)^3} + 3$  (M is equal to three point five G plus V divided by 2 over 4 times H-2-O to the third power.)

SPORT                   What writers drink after a hard day.

HARRIET                I should know that...

They enter class. The boy with the purple socks is already there. Harriet, Sport, and Janie find desks near each other. Harriet takes out her notebook.

HARRIET                (Voice/over) That boy with purple socks is here again. Who ever heard of purple socks?

JANIE                    (To Harriet) There's that dreadful Beth-Ellen Hansen.

Beth-Ellen enters timidly and sits, timidly. Harriet writes:

HARRIET                (Voice/over) Beth-Ellen always looks like she might cry.

Marion Hawthorn enters imperiously, shadowed by Rachel Hennessey.

MARION                Good morning, Harriet, Simon, Jane.

RACHEL                Good morning, Harriet, Simon, Jane.

Harriet and Sport squelch laughter.

JANIE                    Are they not too much?

Carrie Andrews enters clumsily and waves to all. Harriet writes:

HARRIET                (Voice/over) Carrie Andrews is considerably fatter this year.

Laura Peters enters gawkily, giggling, and sits besides Carrie. Harriet writes:

HARRIET                (Voice/over) And Laura Peters is thinner and uglier. I think she could use some braces on her teeth.

SPORT                   Oh boy...

Pinky Whitehead enters weakly, sits weakly and gives a weak smile. Harriet writes:

HARRIET (Voice/over) Pinky Whitehead has not changed. Pinky Whitehead will never change. My mother is always saying Pinky Whitehead's problem is his mother. Does his mother hate him? If I had him, I'd hate him.

Miss Elson enters and all the children rise.

MISS ELSON Good morning . . .

The children sit and Miss Elson continues talking but cannot be heard above Harriet's writing:

HARRIET (Voice/over) I'll tell you one thing. I don't want to live like Miss Elson. The other day I saw her in the grocery store and she bought one small can of tuna, a diet cola, and a pack of cigarettes. Not even one tomato. She must have a terrible life

MISS ELSON ...That said...I'm eager to tell you that this semester begins The Gregory School's 'Keep Clean Campaign'. That means we're all going to make a special Gregory effort to keep the school halls and classrooms free of messy candy wrappers and all that chewed out gum disposed of under every convenient desk. It will not do! Sixth grade is an important time in your life and I'm sure no one wants an untidy school to stain their memory...

Marion waves her hand frantically

MISS ELSON Yes, Marion.

MARION Miss Elson, couldn't we form litter police patrols to make sure everybody is obeying the cleanliness laws?

MISS ELSON Good suggestion, Marion. We need more thinkers like you! But let's first see how the campaign progresses, shall we? And now, people, we'll have the election for class reporter, who as you know has the honor to write and edit the sixth grade page for the Gregory School News! The floor is now officially open for nominations...

SPORT I nominate Harriet Welsh.

JANIE (Yells) I second it!

RACHEL                   *(Prissy)* I nominate Marion Hawthorne. She, as we all know, is an extremely experienced reporter, since she's been class editor for us since first grade. I almost don't know why we even have to have an election.

MISS ELSON               This is an exercise in democracy, Rachel. One never knows the outcome, and it's good to keep those democratic muscles limber.

RACHEL                   Yes, Miss Elson. *(Rachel sits then waves her hand wildly)*

MISS ELSON               Anyone else? What is it, Rachel...

RACHEL                   Miss Elson, I would just like to add that Marion is honest, thoughtful, hardworking, and generous to all those students who she has seen chewing gum which is strictly forbidden, and other people who have dropped candy wrappers everywhere. She has never told on anyone. Yet.

*The class shifts uncomfortably in their seats. Marion shoots Beth Ellen a look and Beth Ellen rises timidly.*

BETH ELLEN               *(Stammering)* I second Marion Hawthorne's nomination.

MISS ELSON               Any further nominations? No? Then let's vote. All those in favor of Harriet Welsch for class reporter?

*Janie, Sport, Harriet and Pinky raise their hands.*

MISS ELSON               In favor of Marion Hawthorne?

*Marion, Rachel, Carrie, Laura, Beth- Ellen and The Boy with Purple Socks raise their hands.*

MISS ELSON               Marion Hawthorne is hereby elected... Congratulations Marion...

*Miss Elson's voice fades out behind Harriet as she writes:*

HARRIET                   *(Voice/over)* You'd think the teachers would smell a rat because neither me nor Sport nor Janie has ever won an election in this school.



The school bell rings and the students stand in groups of their friends to exit.

JANIE                      Our day will come... Just wait...

SPORT                     Forget it... Hey Harriet, whyncha come over this afternoon...

The three friends leave school for the street.

HARRIET                  After my spy route maybe...

SPORT                     Gee, Janie's working in her lab, you two are always working...

JANIE                      I can't stop now. I'm developing a formula to blow up my enemies...

HARRIET                  Oooohhh....

JANIE                      I'm serious, Harriet... This time they're really after me.

SPORT                     Who?

JANIE                      My mother, my father, my brother, my grandfather. .My mother says since I'm going to blow up the world I have to go to dancing school and learn manners...

SPORT                     *(With a shrug)* Grown-ups.

JANIE                      This time they could take it all away. My laboratory, equipment, my Bunsen burner.

HARRIET                  What would you do?

Sport and Janie walk Harriet to her door.

JANIE                      Leave of course, run away somewhere where chemists are appreciated.

SPORT                     You mean like a drug store?

JANIE &  
HARRIET

SPORT!

HARRIET

What is this about dancing school?

JANIE

Just wait, buddy, they're gonna get you too. I heard my mother talking to your mother. Whoever heard of Pasteur going to dancing school? Or Madame Curie, or Einstein?

HARRIET

Whether they how it or not, I'm not going.

JANIE

They will never get us.

*The three friends shake hands, all together. Sport and Janie exit, shouting:*

SPORT & JANIE

Never!

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