

PLAYS FOR
New Audiences

A Division of Children's Theatre Company

The Hundred Dresses

by Mary Hall Surface

Based on the book by Eleanor Estes

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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

By Mary Hall Surface

Adapted from the book by Eleanor Estes

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.

PURCHASE PERUSAL FOR FULL SCRIPT