

## First Flight

### (Class X – NCERT English)

#### Chapter 5: The Hundred Dresses - I – El Bsoor Ester

##### Detailed Summary (Expanded, Exam-Oriented)

The story "The Hundred Dresses" is about a poor Polish girl named Wanda Petronski who is teased by her classmates because of her unusual name and shabby appearance. The story is set in an American school and explores themes of bullying, prejudice, and regret.

Wanda Petronski sits in the corner of Room Thirteen with the rough boys who rarely get good marks and are generally the troublemakers. She sits there because her feet are usually covered with dry mud and her dress is always faded and wrinkled. She is quiet and does not talk to anyone.

The girls in the class, particularly Peggy and Maddie, notice Wanda because of her unusual last name - Petronski. They find it strange and difficult to pronounce. Peggy is the most popular girl in school - pretty, with nice clothes and curly hair. Maddie is her best friend, though she comes from a poor family herself.

One day, Wanda claims she has a hundred dresses at home - all lined up in her closet. The girls do not believe her because Wanda comes to school every day wearing the same faded blue dress. Peggy and the other girls start a game where they wait for Wanda every day before school and ask her about her hundred dresses.

Peggy asks questions like "How many dresses did you say you had?" and "What kind of dresses?" Wanda always replies seriously that she has a hundred dresses - all different colors and styles. She describes them as blue, green, red, with ribbons, velvet, and silk. The girls giggle at her stories, treating them as lies.

Maddie feels uncomfortable with this game but does not say anything. She is Peggy's best friend and does not want to lose that friendship. Moreover, Maddie herself is poor - she wears hand-me-down clothes from Peggy. She worries that if she speaks up for Wanda, the girls might start teasing her too.

Maddie tries to convince herself that Peggy is not really cruel. After all, Peggy protects smaller children from bullies, cries when she sees sad things, and even has a kind nature. But Maddie knows in her heart that what they are doing to Wanda is wrong.

Maddie decides she will write a note to Peggy asking her to stop teasing Wanda. She starts writing it during class but tears it up because she realizes Peggy would not understand. Peggy would just make fun of her for being sensitive. Maddie compromises with herself - she decides she will not

tease Wanda herself but will not stop Peggy either.

One day, Wanda is absent from school. Days pass, and she continues to be absent. Nobody really notices or cares much. After many days, Miss Mason, their teacher, receives a letter from Wanda's father. He writes that Wanda will not be coming to school anymore because the family is moving to a big city.

In the letter, Mr. Petronski explains that they are moving because people in the town make fun of their name and treat them as outsiders. He writes that in the big city, there are many families with names like theirs, and they will not be treated as different. He mentions that Wanda is a good girl and will not come to school anymore.

Miss Mason reads the letter to the class without mentioning names, but everyone understands she is talking about Wanda. She speaks about the importance of being kind and not judging people based on their names or appearance. Her words make the students feel uncomfortable, particularly Peggy and Maddie.

Miss Mason mentions that before leaving, Wanda submitted drawings for the school drawing and writing competition. The competition was to design dresses. She calls Peggy and Maddie to look at Wanda's drawings.

To everyone's amazement, Wanda has submitted a hundred beautiful dress designs. Each design is unique, colorful, and exquisite. The drawings show dresses in every color imaginable - blue, green, red, with intricate details of ribbons, ruffles, and patterns. They are brilliant designs that anyone would love to wear.

The class is stunned. They realize that Wanda's hundred dresses were not lies - they were designs she had created in her imagination and drawn on paper. Her hundred dresses were real, just not in the way everyone had assumed. She had told the truth all along.

Wanda wins the girls drawing competition with her hundred dress designs. All her beautiful drawings are displayed around Room Thirteen. Every girl in the class, including Peggy, admires the dresses and wishes she could have designed them.

But Wanda is gone. She has left the school and the town. Peggy and Maddie realize too late that Wanda was talented and truthful. They had mocked and teased someone who was actually gifted and honest. They feel guilty and wish they could tell Wanda how sorry they are and how much they admire her work.

## Central Themes

### 1. Bullying and Its Effects

The story shows how casual cruelty and teasing can deeply hurt others. Wanda's family leaves town because of the constant mockery they face.

### 2. Prejudice and Discrimination

Wanda is teased because of her Polish name and poor appearance, showing how people judge others based on superficial differences.

### 3. Regret and Guilt

Peggy and Maddie feel guilty after discovering Wanda's talent and realizing she was telling the truth. Their regret comes too late.

### 4. Being a Bystander

Maddie represents those who know something is wrong but remain silent out of fear. The story questions the morality of passive witnessing of bullying.

### 5. Hidden Talents and Worth

Wanda's true worth was hidden beneath her shabby appearance. The story teaches not to judge people by external appearances.

## Character Analysis

### 1. Wanda Petronski

A quiet, poor Polish girl who is teased for her name and appearance. She is talented, creative, and honest. Despite being mocked, she maintains her dignity and tells the truth about her hundred dresses (her designs). She is sensitive and hurt by the teasing but does not retaliate.

### 2. Peggy

The most popular girl in school who leads the teasing of Wanda. She is pretty, well-dressed, and has many friends. She is not intentionally cruel and even protects smaller children from bullies, but she does not realize the pain her teasing causes Wanda.

### 3. Maddie

Peggy's best friend who is also poor and wears hand-me-down clothes. She feels uncomfortable with the teasing but remains silent out of fear and loyalty to Peggy. She struggles with her conscience throughout the story.

### 4. Miss Mason

The teacher who tries to teach the class about kindness and acceptance after Wanda leaves. She represents the moral voice in the story.

## Important Vocabulary (With Meanings)

- **Stolidly** – calmly, without showing emotion
- **Incredulously** – in a manner showing disbelief
- **Exaggerated** – represented as greater than reality
- **Mistreated** – treated badly or unfairly
- **Scuffled** – engaged in a short, confused fight
- **Hopscotch** – a children's game involving hopping
- **Courteous** – polite, respectful
- **Deliberately** – intentionally, on purpose

- **Drab** – dull, lacking brightness
- **Trudged** – walked slowly with heavy steps

### Exam-Ready Key Points

- Wanda Petronski is a poor Polish girl teased for her unusual name and shabby dress
- She claims to have a hundred dresses at home, which no one believes
- Peggy, the popular girl, leads the teasing by asking about the dresses daily
- Maddie feels uncomfortable but stays silent out of fear and loyalty
- Wanda stops coming to school; her father writes that they are moving away
- The family leaves because people mock their name and treat them as outsiders
- Before leaving, Wanda submits a hundred beautiful dress designs for competition
- Her designs win the competition - she had told the truth about her hundred dresses
- The dresses were designs she created, not physical dresses in her closet
- Peggy and Maddie feel guilty and regret their behavior, but it is too late
- Story teaches about bullying, prejudice, and the importance of kindness