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Dramatic Publishing

THE LITTLE MATCH GIRL

A drama in one act by
HERMAN AMMANN

Based on a fairy tale by
HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN

THE LITTLE MATCH GIRL

“The people of Alaska will benefit by being able to see this fine play.” (KUAC-TV, Fairbanks)

“We are again using *The Little Match Girl* for our Christmas program this year ... Thanks for such delightful material.” (Suzette Valentine, Edgewood, Tex., High School)

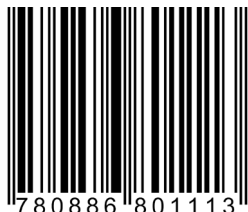
Drama. Adapted by Herman Ammann. Based on the Hans Christian Andersen tale. *Cast: 8m., 10w., extras.* Hans Christian Andersen’s tragic story is dramatized with love and tenderness. Ragged, hungry little Maggie tries to sell matches on the icy streets of a cold city, but no one will buy them—not because people are malicious or spiteful, but because they are so involved in their own interests that they fail to understand the needs of others. In desperation Maggie lights her matches to warm herself. She doesn’t get warm, but somehow her pitiful little flame lights up the world around her. It is especially meaningful at Christmas—or any season. Maggie may be almost any age of childhood—from a preschooler to a young high school girl. And her story appeals to children and adults alike. This play is ideal for directors who want to use a large number of people; the size of the cast is virtually unlimited. Fourteen girls and eleven boys appeared in the premiere production. However, the size of the cast may be drastically reduced by letting some of the characters play two, or even three, parts. The Usher, for example, might double as the Grandmother and a passerby. *The outdoor staging may be elaborate or simple. Authentic Victorian costumes may be used against a three-dimensional set. Or the costumes may be symbolic capes and hoods and the set may be a simple cardboard cut-out painted to represent the facade of a row of buildings. In fact, the play may be set in the present day with modern dress. The Director’s Script includes a detailed discussion of costumes and set. Approximate running time: 25-30 minutes. Code: LJ2.*

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(THE LITTLE MATCH GIRL)

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The Little Match Girl

“The Little Match Girl” was first presented at the Schulenburg Theatre Festival on April 10 and 11, 1970. Nan Newman was the director. The cast was as follows:

MAGGIE	Kaye Lynn Janacek
FATHER	Frank Tilicek
VISITOR	Gary McBride
GUARDIAN ANGEL	Glynis Tietjen
GRANDMOTHER	Marilyn Lippman
USHER	Arleas Upton
FIRST MAN.	Paul Porter
FIRST WOMAN	Carolyn Krischke
SECOND MAN	Dennis Lebeda
SECOND WOMAN	Joy Tackett
THIRD MAN	Deron Ferrell
THIRD WOMAN	Debbie Winkler
FOURTH MAN	Keith Deterling
FOURTH WOMAN	Betty Wagner
HOSTESS.	Kathie Michael
ANOTHER WOMAN	Linda Anders
JIM	Roger Sustr
TOM	Steven Kusy
NITA	Cheryl Baylor
SARA	Dinah Stoner
PASSERBY and STAGEHANDS	David Frietsch, Joe Kurtz, George Montes, Karen Schramek, Diane Schramek

*London
100 Years Ago*

NOTES ON THE PLAY

“The Little Match Girl” is a dramatization of Hans Christian Andersen’s famous fairy tale.

It depicts a ragged, hungry little girl – Maggie – who tries to sell matches on the icy streets of a cold city. No one will buy her matches – not because people are malicious or spiteful, but because they are so involved in their own interests that they fail to understand the needs of others. In desperation Maggie lights her matches to warm herself. She does not get warm . . . but, somehow, her pitiful little flame lights up the world around her.

Maggie may be almost any age of childhood – from a preschooler to a young high school girl. And her story appeals to children and adults alike.

This play is ideal for directors who want to use a large number of people; the size of the cast is virtually unlimited. Fourteen girls and eleven boys appeared in the premiere production. However, the size of the cast may be drastically reduced by letting some of the characters play two, or even three, parts. The Usher, for example, might double as the Grandmother and a passerby.

Staging may be elaborate or simple. Authentic Victorian costumes may be used against a three-dimensional set. Or the costumes may be symbolic capes and hoods and the set may be a simple cardboard cut-out painted to represent the facade of a row of buildings. In fact, the play may be set in the present day with modern dress. The ‘Stage Magic’ Production Script includes a detailed discussion of costumes and set (see page 19).

The Little Match Girl

By Herman Ammann

[When it is time for the play to begin, ushers close the lobby doors. It is important that no one be permitted to enter the auditorium during the Angel's speech. The curtain remains closed. The GUARDIAN ANGEL appears through the center opening of the act curtain and addresses the audience from the apron.]

GUARDIAN ANGEL. Did you ever wonder where angels come from? Why, I'll bet you thought they were made in Heaven, didn't you? Or that they have always been there . . . like the Pearly Gates and the Streets of Gold. Well, it isn't like that at all. I know, because I am the Guardian Angel. I have charge of all the little Angels in Heaven. And do you know something? It is very hard to become an Angel. Only the dearest and sweetest are chosen. Let me tell you about a little Angel that came to us back in the year of — well — it was over a hundred years ago. Her name was Maggie, and she sold matches on the streets to keep from starving. But we didn't choose her because she was poor. Most people are. And she wasn't the kind of person who tries to change the world with one stroke, perform a miracle, do some great deed. The little Maggies know that that isn't the way it's done. They just concentrate on that part of the world right around themselves; and no matter how miserable and hopeless things might seem, they just smile — they try so hard. And when they fail, all the Angels weep . . . with a kind of sweet sadness. This play tonight will show you why we chose Maggie.

[The GUARDIAN ANGEL exits. Just as the curtain is about to open a second or two later, there is a knock at the door. After a few seconds the knock is repeated very loudly. Someone in authority in the audience says, "Will one of the

ushers please see who that is!" The USHER opens the door and the VISITOR comes in and starts toward Row 1, with the USHER following. (If necessary to see clearly, the house lights may come back on; or a spotlight may pick up the Usher and the Visitor after he enters.) The Visitor is well dressed, like the other members of the audience, except that there is something unworldly about him – perhaps an opera cape lined in red.]

USHER. What in this world do you want?

VISITOR. I want to see the play.

USHER. I'm sorry, but the rules are very firm. No one is allowed to enter the theatre after the play has begun.

VISITOR. You mean it has already started? [*Gestures toward the stage*] The curtain isn't open.

USHER. No, but it is time for it to open. You are delaying the first scene. You probably don't even have a ticket.

VISITOR. [*Fumbling in various pockets*] I had a ticket, but I seem to have lost it. Anyway, I don't really need a ticket; I am a sort of guest. I mean I am part of every audience.

USHER. But if you don't have a ticket, you don't have any place to be seated. I am afraid I will have to ask you to leave. [*VISITOR sits on floor in an aisle.*] You can't sit there!

VISITOR. Why not?

USHER. Because there are laws. Fire laws. No one is allowed to sit in the aisle – to block the aisle!

VISITOR. [*Rises and starts down the aisle toward the steps leading to the stage*] If I can't sit in the auditorium with the rest of the audience, I'll go backstage.

USHER. [*Following as VISITOR crosses the apron*] But you can't go back there either! You're not part of the cast. You just simply aren't allowed back there. No one is! Your presence will ruin the play! *Please come back!*

VISITOR. [*Stops just before going through the curtain*] You are wrong about ruining the play. I have seen this play many times. As a matter of fact, I am in it. I don't have many

lines, but in this play I am always present. Mark my word. You'll see me well enough. [*Calling to wings*] Hey you, back there! Open the curtain! And kill the house lights. [*Or "that spot" if a special spotlight has been following him. He disappears through curtain. USHER runs after him and also disappears.*]

[*House lights (or spot) out. Curtain opens just wide enough to reveal a table and two chairs. There is an old jug on the table. The VISITOR is standing behind the table with arms folded. He speaks to the audience.*]

VISITOR. This scene represents the home of Maggie and her Father. It is in London — over a hundred years ago.* As you can see, they are very poor. Maggie's father is a no-good drunk. The time is in the middle of winter — it's New Year's Eve, as a matter of fact — a season of great hardship and suffering for people like Maggie and her old man. [*Pause*] I hope it tears your hearts out. [*He retires to a stool and watches the following scene. He should be dimly lit and unobtrusive. Maggie's FATHER enters, pushing MAGGIE roughly before him, toward the table. She is shabbily dressed - a pitiful little girl.*]

FATHER. [*Perhaps with a Cockney accent, though this is not essential to his characterization; he is rough and uncouth.*] You don't cry enough! People aren't going to buy no matches off of you if you're always smiling like a blooming daffy-dill!

MAGGIE. [*Cowering away from him*] Mother always smiled.

FATHER. Right! And what did it get her, I want to know? She up and died. And now I'm stuck with the whole bloody business of raising a brat! A lot to smile about, if you ask me!

*The play may be set in Copenhagen, New York, or any other large European or American city, and the time may be the present. See Introduction to Production Script.

MAGGIE. But, Father, things will surely get better. We have celebrated Christmas, and the year is nearly gone. I just know the New Year will bring us good fortune.

FATHER. Good fortune! It's going to bring you more blooming beatings if you don't bring home some money! Maybe I ought to beat you anyway. [*As he threatens to strike her, he sees the jug and it distracts him.*] This jug is nearly empty. Why did the Lord curse me with a girl! You can't steal and you can't lie. People don't even believe you when you tell the bloody truth! [*He bangs the empty jug on the table.*] It's empty, do you hear? It's empty!

MAGGIE. [*Timidly reaching out a hand to stroke his head*] Dear Father, I wish you wouldn't. I pray you might . . . we have some bread . . .

FATHER. [*Knocking her hand away*] Bread! Bread, she says! I'll break your bread-basket head, you little good-for-nothing! I need something to raise me spirits. Out with you! Take your matches and get to work . . . don't come back without the means to fill my jug! The Devil will get me before the Lord if I don't have some grog to help me welcome the New Year!

MAGGIE. [*Retreating as he comes near her*] But, Father, it's snowing! Couldn't I wait until morning . . . please!

FATHER. Out with you! Out! Out! [*MAGGIE exits. FATHER returns to table, picks up jug, pounds it on the table, sets it down, falls into a chair, buries his head in his hands, and sobs.*]

[*If a special spot illuminates the VISITOR, it may become brighter at this point. There is a pleased look on his face. He crosses to the table, jabs FATHER on the shoulder, and motions him offstage. As FATHER exits, VISITOR calls into wings.*]

VISITOR. A couple of you stagehands – strike this table and chairs. And don't forget the jug. It's empty anyway. [*STAGEHANDS remove table, chairs, and jug.*] And now open the curtain all the way so these citizens [*indicates the*

audience with a sneer] can see the next scene. [*Motions toward Stage Right.*] Behold! — a street in London!

[*The left half of the stage (the “dream side”) is bare, and — if lighting effects are used — remains dark throughout the next scene. The right half of the stage (the “realistic side”) represents a street passing before a row of buildings — houses and shops. VISITOR retires to his stool to watch. Joyous Christmas and New Year’s Eve music is heard. People pass back and forth along the street. They all wear heavy coats and head protection, for it is a very cold night. Nevertheless, there is a spirit of gaiety in the air. MAGGIE enters among the passersby, cold and lonely in her sparse rags. She holds matches out to a person here and there, but no one notices her. FIRST MAN and FIRST WOMAN, dressed as though they might be going to a New Year’s Eve party, enter talking.*]

FIRST MAN. Isn’t this a glorious night!

FIRST WOMAN. I just love this time of year. The wonderful snow, the crisp air! Just right for warm furs. [*She snuggles into her coat.*] Thanks so much, darling, for this new coat.

FIRST MAN. Not at all. You know this was a great year for me. I made more money than ever before.

MAGGIE. [*Approaching them*] Matches, sir? Would you buy a match?

[*They ignore her and exit. Others are coming and going. SECOND MAN and WOMAN enter.*]

SECOND MAN. This must be the coldest night of the year. The lakes are frozen solid — I can try out those new skates I got for Christmas.

SECOND WOMAN. I don’t remember when I’ve enjoyed the Christmas season so much. All that food! I bet I gained ten pounds!

MAGGIE. [*Approaching couple*] Matches? Please buy my matches.

SECOND MAN. Don’t bother us, dear. [*MAGGIE goes away; mingling with the passing crowd.*]

SECOND WOMAN. The beggars are thick as flies this time of year.

SECOND MAN. Why of course — they know this is the season when every heart is generous. I bet she makes quite a pile.

SECOND WOMAN. I bet they do, too. They dress pitifully to fool you. They are sort of cute in a way, but when you think about it, they are really little robbers. [*Her voice trails off as they exit.*]

[*MAGGIE wanders along the street calling, "Matches, matches anyone? Please buy my matches." The PEOPLE keep hurrying back and forth and no one seems to pay much attention to her. The crowd thins, and for a moment the stage is empty except for Maggie. She waves her arms and stamps her feet to keep warm. She gives the impression that she is bitterly cold. THIRD MAN and WOMAN, well dressed, enter.*]

MAN. Little girl, what are you doing out on the street at this hour?

MAGGIE. I have matches to sell, sir. Won't you please give me a copper for one?

THIRD WOMAN. [*Pulling her husband away*] A likely story! She has no doubt run away from home and is lost. It serves her right!

THIRD MAN. I wouldn't mind buying a match from her, but there is one of these ragamuffins on every corner. When will the poor stop breeding like rabbits? Why, you'd think a person owed them a living. Well, perhaps I should buy just one match . . . I wouldn't want to be worrying about her all night.

THIRD WOMAN. No you don't! When I want to buy something, you say we don't have the money. Well, maybe we could afford it if you'd stop being a fool every time you meet someone with a sad tale!

THIRD MAN. I suppose you are right. But she does look cold and hungry. I hate to see people like that. Looks like their parents would keep them off the streets. [*Turns to Mag-*

gie] Happy New Year, little girl! [*To Woman, as they exit*] That ought to cheer her up. There's nothing like a "Happy New Year!" to cheer a person.

MAGGIE. [*Calls after Couple*] And a Happy New Year to you, too, sir! [*MAGGIE's smile fades as the cold bites deeper. She lights a match and tries to warm her fingers. She huddles against the wall of a building.*]

[*The special spot may come up briefly, showing the VISITOR sitting with arms folded and a pleased expression on his face. The spot dims down and four CHILDREN run in singing, " 'Tis the season to be jolly, tra-la-la-la-la-la-la."*]

TOM. Happy New Year, world! Haven't we had a great time! I can't wait to get at that plum pudding and roast goose!

JIM. Oh, I don't know if I'm hungry. I've been eating all afternoon. [*Other CHILDREN agree, saying things like, "Me, too!" "I couldn't hold another thing!" etc. They exit singing the same song.*]

MAGGIE. " 'Tis the season to be jolly . . . tra-la-la-la—" [*her voice trails off*]. Oh, I know, but somehow I just can't sing. It's so cold. I wonder if they are really going to have roast goose? Do people really stuff them with apples and raisins and chestnuts? Gee, I can almost smell a big fat goose cooking over the fire. What a wonderful thing it must be to have plenty to eat. I suppose there are people in the world like that. I mean people that can eat all they want. [*She shivers. She crouches against the wall of a house. She strikes several matches, one at a time, and tries to warm her fingers. As last match dies, FOURTH MAN and WOMAN come out on threshold of house, saying "Happy New Year" and "good-night" to someone in the house.*]

MAN. I say, it's cold out here! It will take every ounce of that goose to keep me warm.

FOURTH WOMAN. [*She speaks with phony elegance to unseen hostess*] It sure was a most delicious dinner. You will have to come over and see us next week. Harry killed a stag a fortnight ago, and we are going to have venison. We'll let you know.

FOURTH MAN. [*Notices Maggie.*] I say, my child, what have you been doing out here? I'll wager you have been peeping in the window, watching us eat the goose, haven't you?

MAGGIE. [*Rises, politely*] No, sir. The window is too high, but I wouldn't look in even if I could. I didn't know you had a goose. But I did think I smelled a goose cooking. I thought it was my imagination.

FOURTH WOMAN. I believe she is lying. Like I have always said, a person should keep their shutters drawn. All sort of thieves and street urchins can spy on you during the night.

HOSTESS. [*Inside house*] Who are you talking to? Who is outside?

FOURTH WOMAN. Just one of those street urchins. No one of any importance.

HOSTESS. [*Looking out of doorway*] A street urchin? Why, it looks like a little girl to me. What are you doing out here, child?

MAGGIE. I have matches to sell, madam. You may have two matches for a copper.

HOSTESS. Well, as you can see, I have a blazing fire going and don't need your matches. [*Shivering*] Perhaps I should close the door — otherwise all the warmth will escape. [*She starts to go in but hesitates and studies Maggie's thin features.*] I shouldn't mind giving you a bit of the goose, though. That is, if you are hungry. [*She doesn't need a reply.*] I'll get it. [*Enters house. MAGGIE peers through the door.*]

MAGGIE. Oh, it does smell wonderful . . . but you don't need my matches, and I haven't any money. It would be wrong to take something without paying. [*HOSTESS returns with goose wrapped in a cloth. MAGGIE looks at it longingly.*] I just don't know what to do.

HOSTESS. Nonsense. We have had our fill. The goose is yours, little dear. [*She holds the bundle out to Maggie. MAGGIE hesitates a moment. Just as she reaches for it, FOURTH WOMAN puts her hand on the bundle.*]

FOURTH WOMAN. Oh, I forgot to tell you. Our coachman's wife is ill. I could take the goose and make her a nice

broth. I am sure she would respond with good cheer. You know she is a marvelous seamstress. Perhaps I could induce her to sew you a new gown for the charity ball. We always support these charity things, you know.

HOSTESS. She does sew beautifully, doesn't she? Well, if she is ill, she could certainly use the broth. Would you remember to remind her about the gown?

FOURTH WOMAN. Why, you know I will, and I promise she won't forget you. It isn't every day a body gets broth made from such a tasty goose.

HOSTESS. But what about this child? She does appear to be hungry.

FOURTH WOMAN. You wouldn't be doing her a favor. The food is too rich for her kind. She isn't used to it. I'd say she is better off with the gruel she should be eating at home this very minute.

HOSTESS. [*Gives goose to Woman, turns to Maggie*] She really is right, dear. I wouldn't want to make you ill. Go home and eat your gruel.

MAGGIE. Yes, ma'am. And thank you for letting me share the warmth of your threshold. [*HOSTESS closes her door; FOURTH MAN and WOMAN start off stage. MAGGIE huddles against building.*]

FOURTH MAN. What is that story you made up about the coachman's wife being sick? She's as healthy as a brood mare.

FOURTH WOMAN. So? We can reheat the goose for dinner tomorrow. And you had better get hold of some stag meat. That woman won't give me any rest until we pay her back. [*Exit yakking.*]

MAGGIE. The fire was so warm for a few moments. That goose smelled so wonderful. It all seems like a dream. Maybe I did have a dream. The night is so cold. It is so easy to imagine things that can never be.

[*MAGGIE huddles close to the building as though trying to draw some warmth from it. She shrinks into a smaller and smaller bundle as the spot dims up on VISITOR. He has*

watched the scene with arms folded and a pleased expression on his face. He now advances to where Maggie lies huddled. He bends down and looks at her closely; she seems to be asleep. He beckons to stagehands in the left wing. STAGEHANDS bring out a rocking chair and place it at Down Left Center. GRANDMOTHER enters and sits in the rocking chair. VISITOR speaks to audience. If lighting effects are used, lights on right half of stage dim out and those illuminating left half of stage dim up.]

VISITOR. Your little friend isn't doing so well. Her mind wanders. Is it all a dream? She is not sure. Now she slips away again. It is another time, another place. A warm day last summer. She is arriving at her grandmother's house . . . What a joke! Her grandmother has been dead for many months. It is a human frailty, to dream and to pursue a dream. To escape, to want to be warm again, to be loved. What a folly for somebody like her . . . to dream. [*Exit laughing*]

[*While the VISITOR was talking, MAGGIE unobtrusively exited and crossed backstage to left wing. GRANDMOTHER rocks slowly and knits. There is a knock off Left.*]

GRANDMOTHER. Who is it?

MAGGIE. [*Offstage*] It's Maggie, Grandmother. I've come to see you.

GRANDMOTHER. Come in, darling. Come in. [*MAGGIE enters.*] What a nice surprise. I wasn't expecting you for another week or two.

MAGGIE. I just wanted to come early. It's so good to get away from the crowded streets in London. I just love to be with you.

GRANDMOTHER. You know you're welcome to come and live with me.

MAGGIE. But Father needs me — he has no one else to look after him . . . he's ill, Grandmother. He hardly ever leaves the house. Grandmother, do you think things will ever be better for us? I mean . . . perhaps I dream too much.

GRANDMOTHER. Well, now, it is very hard to dream too much. A little lady like you might well be able to make her dreams come true.

MAGGIE. Oh, I hope so! I want to be a dancer and appear in the great halls. I want so much to be the very best. I want to dance before the Queen!

GRANDMOTHER. Darling, that is quite a dream! You are going to have to work a little harder than I expected. But you must look on everything as a great challenge. Otherwise you will be only fairly good, and that's really no good at all.

MAGGIE. You make everything sound so easy. You make me feel as though my dreams really can come true.

GRANDMOTHER. Of course they can come true. You must not forget that.

MAGGIE. I won't. But why are you so serious? I am young. We have many years to be together.

GRANDMOTHER. No, dear child. When you are your age, you look forward to endless years. Time has no meaning. But to me, time is a precious thing.

MAGGIE. Why, Grandmother?

GRANDMOTHER. Oh, darling, there is a time for the sun to set and the river to flow to the sea. You need not concern yourself with such things now. Come, sit by my knee. There are some things that I want you to hear.

MAGGIE. Grandmother, there are tears on your cheek.

GRANDMOTHER. It seems sometime as though we live in a world, and in a time, that are cruel and unjust. That for every little bit of laughter, there's always a tear. But the tears can be brushed away. It comes to me that the thing I have suspected about you these past few years has at last come to be true. You, my darling, are one of the chosen.

MAGGIE. One of what?

GRANDMOTHER. Listen. There are men that stride through this world making a thunderous noise. People fear them, and become their slaves. They build and destroy great cities without a care. And then they are gone from this