

from THE MATCHMAKER

CHARACTERS:

MR. VANDERGELDER—wealthy merchant of Yonkers, New York

ERMIENGARDE—his niece

AMBROSE KEMPER—an artist

MRS. DOLLY LEVI—friend of Ermengarde's mother

Scene: VANDERGELDER'S house in Yonkers, New York.

Time: early 1880s

ERMENGARDE has consented to marry AMBROSE KEMPER, but MR. VANDERGELDER, because of what he sees as AMBROSE's deplorable lack of prospects, has furiously forbidden the marriage. MR. VANDERGELDER is sending ERMENGARDE away to "get the romance out of her head."

As this scene opens, VANDERGELDER addresses the audience.

VANDERGELDER: Ninety-nine per cent of the people in the world are fools and the rest of us are in great danger of contagion. But I wasn't always free of foolishness as I am now. I was once young, which was foolish; I fell in love, which was foolish; and I got married, which was foolish; and for a while I was
5 poor, which was more foolish than all the other things put together. Then my wife died, which was foolish of her; I grew older, which was sensible of me; then I became a rich man, which is as sensible as it is rare. Since you see I'm a man of sense, I guess you were surprised to hear that I'm planning to get married again. Well, I've two reasons for it. In the first place, I like my house
10 run with order, comfort, and economy. That's a woman's work; but even a woman can't do it well if she's merely being paid for it. In order to run a house well, a woman must have the feeling that she owns it. Marriage is a bribe to make a housekeeper think she's a householder. Did you ever watch an ant carry a burden twice its size? What excitement! What patience! What
15 will! Well, that's what I think of when I see a woman running a house. What giant passions in those little bodies—what quarrels with the butcher for the best cut—what fury at discovering a moth in a cupboard! Believe me!—if women could harness their natures to something bigger than a house and a baby carriage—tck! tck!—they'd change the world. And the second reason,

Continued

20 ladies and gentlemen? Well, I see by your faces you've guessed it already. There's nothing like mixing with women to bring out all the foolishness in a man of sense. And that's a risk I'm wiffing to take. I've just turned sixty, and I've just laid side by side the last dollar of my first half million. So if I should lose my head a little, I stifi have enough money to buy it back. After many
25 years' caution and hard work, I have earned a right to a little risk and adventure, and I'm thinking of getting married. Yes, like all you other fools, I'm willing to

risk a little security for a certain amount of adventure. Think it over. (Exit back center. AMBROSE enters from the street, crosses left, and whistles softly.

ERMENGARDE enters from left.)

30 **ERMENGARDE:** Ambrose! If my uncle saw you!

AMBROSE: Sh! Get your hat.

ERMENGARDE: My hat!

AMBROSE: Quick! Your trunk's at the station. Now quick! We're running away.

35 **ERMENGARDE:** Running away!

AMBROSE: Sh!

ERMENGARDE: Where?

AMBROSE: To New York. To get married.

ERMENGARDE: Oh, Ambrose, I can't do that. Ambrose dear—it wouldn't be
40 proper!

AMBROSE: Listen. I'm taking you to my friend's house. His wife will take care of
you.

ERMENGARDE: But, Ambrose, a girl can't go on a train with a man. I can see you
don't know anything about girls.

45 **AMBROSE:** But I'm telling you we're going to get married!

ERMENGARDE: Married? But what would Uncle say?

AMBROSE: We don't care what Uncle'd say—we're eloping.

ERMENGARDE: Ambrose Kemper! How can you use such an awful word!

AMBROSE: Ermengarde, you have the soul of a field mouse.

50 **ERMENGARDE** (Crying): Ambrose, why do you say such cruel things to me? (Enter
MRS. LEVI, from the street, right. She stands listening.)

AMBROSE: For the last time I beg you—get your hat and coat. The train leaves in a
few minutes. Ermengarde, we'll get married tomorrow....

ERMENGARDE: Oh, Ambrose! I see you don't understand anything about
55 weddings. Ambrose, don't you respect me?...

MRS. LEVI (Uncertain age; mass of sandy hair; impoverished elegance; large,
shrewd but generous nature, an assumption of worldly cynicism conceals a
tireless amused enjoyment of life. She carries a handbag and a small brown
paper bag): Good morning, darling girl—how are you? (They kiss.)

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- 60 **ERMENGARDE:** Oh, good morning, Mrs. Levi.
MRS. LEVI: And who is this gentleman who is so devoted to you?
ERMENGARDE: This is Mr. Kemper, Mrs. Levi. Ambrose, this is. . . Mrs. Levi she's an old friend.
MRS. LEVI: Mrs. Levi, born Gallagher. Very happy to meet you, Mr. Kemper.
- 65 **AMBROSE:** Good morning, Mrs. Levi.
MRS. LEVI: Mr. Kemper, the artist! Delighted! Mr. Kemper, may I say something very frankly?
AMBROSE: Yes, Mrs. Levi.
MRS. LEVI: This thing you were planning to do is a very great mistake.
- 70 **ERMENGARDE:** Oh, Mrs. Levi, please explain to Ambrose—of course! I want to marry him, but to elope!. . . How...
MRS. LEVI: Now, my dear girl, you go in and keep one eye on your uncle. I wish to talk to Mr. Kemper for a moment. You give us a warning when you hear your Uncle Horace coming.
- 75 **ERMENGARDE:** Ye-es, Mrs. Levi. (Exit ERMENGARDE back center.)
MRS. LEVI: Mr. Kemper, I was this dear girl's mother's oldest friend. Believe me, I am on your side. I hope you two will be married very soon, and I think I can be of real service to you. Mr. Kemper, I always go right to the point.
AMBROSE: What is the point, Mrs. Levi?
- 80 **MRS. LEVI:** Mr. Vandergelder is a very rich man, Mr. Kemper, and Ermengarde is his only relative.
AMBROSE: But I am not interested in Mr. Vandergelder's money. I have enough to support a wife and family.
MRS. LEVI: Enough? How much is enough when one is thinking about children
- 85 and the future? The future is the most expensive luxury in the world, Mr. Kemper.
AMBROSE: Mrs. Levi, what is the point?
MRS. LEVI: Believe me, Mr. Vandergelder wishes to get rid of Ermengarde, and if you follow my suggestions he will even permit her to marry you. You see, Mr.
- 90 Vandergelder is planning to get married himself.
AMBROSE: What? That monster!
MRS. LEVI: Mr. Kemper!
AMBROSE: Married! To you, Mrs. Levi?
MRS. LEVI (Taken aback): Oh, no, no. . . No! I am merely arranging it. I am
- 95 helping him find a suitable bride.
AMBROSE: For Mr. Vandergelder there are no suitable brides.
MRS. LEVI: I think we can safely say that Mr. Vandergelder will be married to someone by the end of next week.

Continued

- AMBROSE:** What are you suggesting, Mrs. Levi?
- 100 **MRS. LEVI:** I am taking Ermengarde to New York on the next train. I shall not take her to Miss Van Huysen's, as is planned; I shall take her to my house. I wish you to call for her at my house at five-thirty. Here is my card.

AMBROSE: "Mrs. Dolly Gallagher Levi. Varicose veins reduced."

MRS. LEVI (Trying to take back card): I beg your pardon...

105 **AMBROSE** (Holding card): I beg your pardon. "Consultations free."

MRS. LEVI: I meant to give you my other card. Here.

AMBROSE: "Mrs. Dolly Gallagher Levi. Aurora Hosiery. Instruction in the guitar and mandolin." You do all these things, Mrs. Levi?

MRS. LEVI: Two and two make four, Mr. Kemper—always did. So you will

110 come to my house at five-thirty. At about six I shall take you both with me to the Harmonia Gardens Restaurant on the Battery; Mr. Vandergelder will be there and everything will be arranged.

AMBROSE: How?

MRS. LEVI: Oh, I don't know. One thing will lead to another.

115 **AMBROSE:** How do I know that I can trust you, Mrs. Levi? You could easily make our situation worse.

MRS. LEVI: Mr. Kemper, your situation could not possibly be worse.

AMBROSE: I wish I knew what you get out of this, Mrs. Levi.

MRS. LEVI: That is a very proper question. I get two things: profit and pleasure.

120 **AMBROSE:** How?

MRS. LEVI: Mr. Kemper, I am a woman who arranges things. At present I am arranging Mr. Vandergelder's domestic affairs. Out of it I get—shall we call it: little pickings? I need little pickings, Mr. Kemper, and especially just now, when I haven't

125 got my train fare back to New York. You see: I am frank with you.

AMBROSE: That's your profit, Mrs. Levi; but where do you get your pleasure?

MRS. LEVI: My pleasure? Mr. Kemper, when you artists paint a hillside or a river you change everything a little, you make thousands of little changes, don't you? Nature is never completely satisfactory and must be corrected.

130 Well, I'm like you artists. Life as it is is never quite interesting enough for me—I'm bored, Mr. Kemper, with life as it is—and so I do things. I put my hand in here, and I put my hand in there, and I watch and I listen—and often I'm very much amused.

Thornton Wilder
20th century American playwright