

Wanted a House keeper

Characters

Abe Perkins

Ike McSweeney

Olga from the Volga

Mrs. Sweetly

Gerald. Mrs Sweetley's little son

Gertie Brass

Mrs Boggins / Gladys Charming

COSTUMES

Abe and Ike are rather untidily dressed in overalls. Olga, a tall girl with an expressionless face, wears gaudy clothing. She speaks in a lonesome voice. Mrs. Sweetley and Gerald are well dressed. Gertie Brass is young and fashionably dressed. She carries a large purse containing make-up, chews gum vigorously, and speaks in a breezy manner. Mrs. Boggins is a large, very elderly woman, shabbily dressed. She is very deaf and stooped, and walks with a cane. Gladys Charming is young, good-looking and very smartly dressed.

SCENE ONE

The farm house of Abe Perkins and Ike McSweeney. The room is in great disorder. A table in the center is



filled with unwashed dishes. A sofa against the back wall is covered with clothing, newspapers, etc. When the curtain rises, Abe and Ike are seated in chairs, one on each side of the table. Ike is peeling potatoes, which he drops into a pot resting on the floor between his feet. Abe is darning a sock with more determination than skill. After the rise of the curtain, these activities continue for a few moments. Then Ike sighs heavily.

IKE: What a life! (Sighs again.)

ABE: What's eating you now?

IKE: Ten potatoes a day — three hundred and sixty five days a year — that's thirty-six hundred and fifty; (for twenty years) — seven hundred and thirty thousand —

ABE: Well, you wanted the potato-peeling job when we started batching together here. I was supposed to mend the clothes, and if you think you got the worst of the deal, I'm willing to trade you any day. Here. (Hands him the sock.) If you had to mend them, you might keep your toes where they belonged once in a while.

IKE: (refusing it) Nothing doing! My toes may not be shy, retiring creatures, but at least they're not diamond drills, like yours. Furthermore, I wish you'd take a few lessons in darning. The lumps in these socks I've got on are killing me.

ABE: I bet there aren't as many lumps as there were in the pudding you made for dinner yesterday. The next time you make a pudding, I wish you'd dice it before you put it on the table.

IKE: (putting down the potatoes) Now, you look here, Abe Perkins, my cooking may not be so very fancy, but at least I know enough to put baking powder in a cake.

ABE: (Putting down sock and standing up belliger-

ently) And you look here, Ike McSweeney, the last time you made a cake, we used it to weight down the drag harrow. And furthermore, it's your turn to wash the dishes.

IKE: (indignantly) My turn! I washed the dishes last week!

ABE: That was the week before.

IKE: The week before it rained, so we didn't have to wash them. And I'll prove it to you, if you want. (Holds up his sleeves threateningly.)

ABE: (more peacefully) All right! All right! No use getting peeved over it. Say, what's the matter with us anyway? We can't get along together any more. We've been batching here together for twenty years, and now it seems as if we can't say a civil word to each other.

IKE: (sitting down disconsolately) You're right. Seems as if we fly off the handle at each other all the time.

ABE: It's this confounded housekeeping. Gets on a fellow's nerves, cooking and mending and keeping the house tidy.

IKE: Yeh. And our own cooking isn't helping us to keep our tempers either. When we were young, we could stand it, but I guess our constitutions aren't as good as they used to be.

ABE: You're right, Ike. I guess we'll have to come down to it at last.

IKE: Come down to what?

ABE: Hiring someone to keep house for us.

IKE: (indignantly) What! And admit we're failures at housekeeping?

ABE: Well, aren't we?

21
WANTED — A HOUSEKEEPER

IKE: (glumly) Yeh, I guess we are.

ABE: You know, I think it would be kind of nice to have some quiet, respectable lady here to look after us. We wouldn't have to peel potatoes.

IKE: Or darn socks.

ABE: Or sweep the floor.

IKE: Or make the beds.

THURMUR: Or, wash the dishes. (They grin at each other.)

ABE: Of course! What fools we were that we didn't hire one before!

IKE: Think of all we've missed!

ABE: (going to sofa and rummaging through the newspapers) Where's the writing paper? We'll send an ad to the paper right away.

IKE: I think there's some ink in the sugar bowl. (Goes off left; immediately returns with sugar bowl.)

ABE: (producing a sheet of paper from the confusion) And the pen rolled under the sofa last month. (Reaches under sofa and produces a pen. They sit down at the table, pushing enough dishes aside to make room.)

ABE: (writing) Wanted—a housekeeper.

IKE: For two respectable farmers.

ABE: Must be able to cook and sew.

IKE: I think you'd better put in "No children". We don't want any noisy kids running around upsetting things.

25
WANTED — A HOUSEKEEPER

ABE: O.K. Signed Abe Perkins and Ike McSweeney, Badger Hollow."

IKE: Fine. We ought to get some results soon.

ABE: There, it's finished. I'll take it down and post it tonight. Won't it be great to have some one around to do all this housework for us!

IKE: You bet! Why didn't we think of it sooner!

CURTAIN

SCENE TWO

The same a few days later. Same dishes on table. Abe and Ike are seated again on each side of the table, but looking much more cheerful than they did in the first scene.

ABE: Well, our ad's been in the paper for two days now. We ought to get some answers pretty soon.

IKE: Yeh. Roast beef and apple pie for supper. Boy oh, boy! (Knock at door, right.)

ABE: Hurray! Here's someone now. (Goes to right.)
Come in madam.

(Enter Olga.)

IKE: (rising) Won't you take a chair, ma'am!

OLGA: (staring at him in surprise) Take a chair? Me! Vol would I want vit a chair? I got lots of chairs at home.

IKE: (alarmed) I meant, won't you please sit down?

OLGA: Sure. (Sits. There is a short silence; then):

ABE: I suppose you came in answer to our advertisement for a housekeeper!

OLGA: Yah. (Another silence.)

ABE: Uh — may we ask your name, madam?

OLGA: I'm Olga — from de Volga.

ABE: Can you cook.

OLGA: Sure. I'm fine cook. I cook cabbage soup and fried pork.

IKE: And apple pie!

OLGA: (stolidly) No, no apple pie. I cook cabbage soup and fried pork.

ABE: Chocolate cake!

OLGA: No, no chocolate cake. Cabbage soup. Fried pork.

ABE: Can't you cook anything else but fried pork?

OLGA: Sure.

ABE: Well, what?

OLGA: Cabbage soup. (Short silence.)

IKE: I suppose you can wash dishes, can't you?

OLGA: Vash dish! Vat is dat!

IKE: You know. You take a cup (takes cup from table) and put it in the dish water and take a cloth and wash it and rinse it and dry it. (Pantomimes washing the cup.)

OLGA: No. No vash dish. My sister Helga, she vash dish.

ABE: Well, don't you think you could learn?

OLGA: No. (Silence.)

IKE: Well, what else can you do?

OLGA: I'm fine cook. I cook cabbage soup and fried pork.

ABE: Well, Miss Olga, I'm afraid you aren't just what we need. We really need somebody who can wash dishes as well.

IKE: We're sorry.

OLGA: (placidly) Oh, dat's all right. Good-bye. (Exit right.)

ABE: Good gracious! That's not a very good start.

IKE: Cabbage soup and fried pork!

(Re-enter OLGA, right.)

OLGA: You vant somebody should vash dish?

ABE: Why, yes.

OLGA: I send my sister Helga. She vash dish.

IKE: Can your sister Helga cook?

OLGA: No. My sister Helga, she vash dish. Me, Olga, I cook. I'm fine cook. I cook

OLGA, ABE AND IKE: . . . cabbage soup and fried pork!

OLGA: You no vant Helga?

ABE: No, ve no vant Helga.

OLGA: (persuasively) My sister Helga, she vash dish.

IKE: (loudly) No, we don't want Helga. Good-bye. (Pushes her off right.)

ABE: Well, better luck next time. (Knock, right.)

IKE: Here comes another. (Goes to right.) Please come in, madam. (Enter Mrs. Sweetly and Gerald.)

WANTED — A HOUSEKEEPER

Mrs. S.: How do you do! You are the gentlemen who advertised for a housekeeper, aren't you? I am Mrs. Sweetly, and this is my little son, Gerald. Say how do you do to the gentlemen, Gerald.

Gerald: (kicking at IKE's shins) Won't.

Mrs. S.: Isn't he the dearest little thing? I was so pleased to see from your advertisement that you had no children living with you. That was really the reason why I answered your advertisement. Gerald doesn't get along with other children at all. They don't understand his sensitive nature.

GERALD: Gee, maw, this place is a dump. I don't want to stay here with those two old guys. Look at that guy's red nose. (Points to ABE.) Haw, haw, haw!

ABE: Say, look here, you little — —

Mrs. S.: Oh, please! You musn't speak harshly to little Gerald. You might give him inhibitions.

ABE: (aside) I'd give him more than that if I had the chance.

GERALD: (spying sofa) Oh, maw, there's a sofa. I'm going to play on it. (Climbs on sofa, and jumps up and down on it.)

IKE: Say, there are good springs in that sofa. (Starts to go over to it. MRS. SWEETLY stops him.)

Mrs. S.: No, don't stop him, please. The exercise will do him good. He doesn't mean a bit of harm by it. He's just playful. (Gerald continues jumping.) Now, to discuss terms. I am quite willing to accept the position, provided that Gerald can have all the milk he wants, and the free run of your farm. He's very mechanically inclined. Gerald is. Have you a tractor?

WANTED — A HOUSEKEEPER

ABE: Why, uh, yes, we have a tractor.

Mrs. S.: Oh, I'm so glad. (GERALD has ceased jumping and amuses himself by playing football with a cushion he has found.) Gerald loves anything in the way of machinery. He can take anything apart. Just give him a monkey wrench and a piece of machinery, and he'll be contented for hours. And, by the way, have you a sleeping porch in your house?

IKE: Uh, no, we haven't.

Mrs. S.: Oh, that's too bad. You must build one at once. Gerald must have fresh air at night or he lacks energy the next day. However, I am willing to try the position for a month, if — (GERALD picks up the cushion and throws it accurately at IKE's head.)

Mrs. S.: (smiling) Dear Gerald has such a sense of humour.

IKE: Madam, did it occur to you that when we said "No children" we meant that we didn't want any children?

Mrs. S.: (astonished) Oh, no! You couldn't mean that! Why, I can't imagine anyone not wanting a sweet little child like Gerald. It makes a house seem so home-like. (GERALD hits ABE with the cushion.)

ABE: (angrily) This is the last straw! (He grabs GERALD.) Now you little monkey, here's where you get what's coming to you. (Puts him over his knee and administers several sound spansks. Mrs. SWEETLY screams and protests.)

Mrs. S.: Don't you dare! Don't you dare! Oh, you brute, you big cruel brute! Gerald's nerves will be ruined!

ABE: (finishing the spanking) It wasn't his nerves I was paddling. Now, you little brat, git!

WANTED — A HOUSEKEEPER

GERALD: (standing and staring at ABE with admiration) Gee, maw, he spanked me!

MRS. S.: (sobbing). Oh, my poor, sweet, innocent little child! Come to your mamma!

GERALD: (in awe). Gee, maw, he spanked me. Nobody ever spanked me before! I like him! Let's stay here!

ABE: (exploding) Madam, if you and your son don't leave immediately, I'll do the same to you.

(MRS. SWEETLY is open-mouthed with horror, while ABE pushes them off right. GERALD continues to protest.)

GERALD: I want to stay here! I want to stay with the nice man who spanked me! I want to — (His voice fades away in the distance.)

ABE: (sitting down and mopping his forehead) This is awful.

IKE: Do you suppose we had better go on trying to do our own housework?

ABE: They haven't been a very promising lot so far, I must admit. If we get another little Gerald, I think we'd better look the door.

IKE: (looking off right) Here comes another customer. (Enter GERTIE BRASS, right.)

GERTIE: (chewing gum vigorously) Hiya, boys! I see you want a housekeeper. My name's Gertie Brass — just call me Gertie. (Sits down, opens her purse, and begins to make up her face.) What're your names?

ABE: I'm Abe Perkins.

GERTIE: How's tricks, Abe!

IKE: I'm Ike McSweeney.

WANTED — A HOUSEKEEPER

GERTIE: Gee, you're cute looking, Ike, with that little moustache of yours. I bet you're a swell dancer.

IKE: (alarmed) Why, uh, no, I don't know how to dance.

GERTIE: G'wan! In this day and age! C'mon, I'll teach you. (Gets up and seizes IKE.)

IKE: But, really, Miss Brass, I can't — I don't want — (GERTIE sings a popular song as she dances the protesting IKE around the room. ABE stares open-mouthed at them. GERTIE finally relinquishes her hold on IKE, who collapses into a chair and mops his forehead.)

GERTIE: (Sits down.) There! You'll soon learn. In a day or two you'll be taking me out to all the dances. (Takes out nail file, and begins to manicure her nails.) I bet we'll have a great old time, you two boys and me. They all said I was crazy when I told them I was going out to work on a farm, and I says to them, look here, you can have just as good a time on a farm as you can in town. Some of these old bachelors can really show a girl a good time. Don't you think so?

ABE: Uh — well — can you cook?

GERTIE: Cook? Oh, sure, good enough. I can swing a mean can-opener, anyway. Good old pork and beans; everybody likes pork and beans. When you get fed up with them, you can take me into town for dinner and a show and dance afterwards.

ABE: Have you had much experience in cooking?

GERTIE: Huh? Experience? Oh, sure. I worked for three weeks at a hamburger stand, but I got so tired of hamburgers I never want to see one again. Anyway, the owner fired me. Said I was lazy and fresh. Can y' imagine it? Well, here I am. Don't you love swing Abe!

ABE: Swing? What's that?

MAE: What's that, he says! Aren't you the little joker, though? Where's your gramophone!

ABE: We haven't got one.

MAE: You haven't got one! (*Doubtfully*) Say! This isn't meant to be a joke, is it? You can't expect a girl to stay here if there isn't a gramophone. You'll have to get one right away. Of course, you can get some pretty good swing over the radio, once in a while. What kind of radio is yours?

IKE: We — we haven't got one.

MAE: (*amazed*) Say, what kind of a place is this, anyway? No gramophone, no radio — I hope you've got a car, anyway!

ABE: No, we haven't. When we want to get the mail, we just take the team.

MAE: (*rising in disgust*) Catch me going to a dance behind a team of horses! Well, that's that. So long, boys. See you at the races. (*Exit right, languidly.*)

ABE: (*in disgust*) Well, if that's the younger generation, I hope our next customer will be a little older.

IKE: (*hopefully*) She — she was a kind of cute little thing, though.

ABE: Just because she made you jump around like a lame jack rabbit! I wish you could have seen yourself. No, we want somebody that's older, more mature, more settled in her ways. (*Knock right.*)

IKE: (*peering off right*) Well, it looks as if you were going to get your wish. (*Enter Mrs. Higgins.*)

Mrs. B.: (*loudly and slowly*) I've come to be your new housekeeper. (*Sits down hurriedly.*)

ABE: What's your name, please, ma'am?

Mrs. B.: (*hand behind ear*) Hey!

ABE: (*aside*) Good grief! She's deaf! (*loudly*) I said, what's your name?

Mrs. B.: Lane! Stuff and nonsense. Never sounder in my life. Got a little touch o' my rheumatics, that's all. What'd you want me to do in here?

IKE: Can you cook?

Mrs. B.: Hey!

IKE: (*more loudly*) Can you cook?

Mrs. B.: Book! What book?

IKE: (*shouting*) CAN YOU COOK!

Mrs. B.: Oh, cook. Why didn't you say so in the first place! Course I can cook. I cooked for all my three husbands, now in their graves, poor souls. ~~My first~~ husband, he was partial to a steak, poor man. He was one of the Higginville Higgineses. Did you know the Higginville Higgineses?

IKE: No.

Mrs. B.: Didn't you? Too bad, they was nice people. Before your time, I guess. My first husband, he was Ira Higgins. We was married twenty years. How that man loved a steak! He died of stomach trouble. My second husband was a Stubbins, one of the Stubbinsville Stubbineses. Did you know the Stubbinsville Stubbineses?

IKE: No.

Mrs. B.: They was nice people, too, but a little before your time, I guess. My second husband, he was Ezra Stubbins. He was partial to a chop. Funny, he died of

34 WANTED — A HOUSEKEEPER

stomach trouble, too. We was married ten years. My cooking was improving, too, he said. My third, he was a Boggins, one of the Bogginsville Bogginses. Did you know — ?

IKE: No.

Mrs. B.: I guess they'd be before your time, too. My third husband, he was Ora Boggins. He was partial to a roast. We was married for five years. He said my cooking was improving all the time.

IKE: Did he die of stomach trouble?

Mrs. B.: Hey!

IKE: (loudly) DID HE DIE OF STOMACH TROUBLE!

Mrs. B.: Goodness, no. What put that in your head? He died of stomach trouble. (Silence, ABE and IKE look at each other apprehensively.)

ABE: I'm sorry, ma'am, but I'm afraid you won't do. I think you're just a little too old.

Mrs. B.: Hey!

ABE: You're too old!

Mrs. B.: Hey!

ABE: OLD! TOO OLD!

Mrs. B.: Old, did ye say? Oh, you want an older woman, is that it!

ABE: Yes.

Mrs. B.: (placidly) Well, you know best. (Rises and hobbles off right.) Still, if you should change your mind, you know my cooking's improving. (Exit.)

ABE: Yeh, her cooking's improving. If she stayed

WANTED — A HOUSEKEEPER

35

here, she'd have ~~be~~ under the sod in six months.

IKE: "Older, maturer, more settled in her ways." Good grief!

ABE: (looking off right) Ike, Ike! Come here quick! Do you see what I see!

IKE: (excitedly) Am I dreaming? Young, pretty —

ABE: (pessimistically) But I don't suppose she can cook. (Knock.) Come in, come in, madam.

(Enter Miss CHARMING. IKE offers her a chair. ABE pushes him to one side and offers her the chair himself.)

Miss C.: Why, thank you, but really I can't —

ABE: (solicitously) You must be tired. Please do sit down and rest. (Miss CHARMING sits.)

IKE: Take this cushion. (Places cushion behind her.)

ABE: Wouldn't you like a cup of tea?

Miss C.: (sweetly) Why, that is lovely of you, really, but —

ABE: (flustered) Why, it's no pleasure at all, it's a trouble — I mean, it's no trouble at all, it's a pleasure.

IKE: Eh — it's delightful of you to have come all the way out here, and we are certainly more than pleased to see you, but there's a question — I really beg your pardon, but — you see — (aside to ABE) you ask her.

ABE: (digging him in the ribs) You ask her.

IKE: Eh — well, it's like this — well — can you cook?

Miss C.: (in some surprise) Why, I don't see just why you should ask, but since you do, I believe that I'm quite a competent cook. I studied household science for four years.

ANN: (*excitedly*) Apple pie?

IKE: Chocolate cake!

MISS C.: (*amused*) I have won prizes for my apple pie and chocolate cake.

ANN: (*aside*) It's a dream! Pinch me, Ike.

MISS C.: If you have no more questions, I should like to ask —

ANN: We'll pay anything you like. Thirty dollars a week.

IKE: Forty!

ANN: Fifty!

MISS C.: (*frowning*) I'm afraid I don't quite —

IKE: I'm Ike McSweeney and this is Abe Perkins, Miss — Miss — ?

MISS C.: My name's Charming. Gladys Charming, but will you please —

IKE: (*eagerly*) Miss Charming — Gladys — would you care to go to a show with me tonight?

ANN: (*indignantly*) She'd be very likely to want to go with a little shrimp like you, wouldn't she? Don't pay any attention to him, Miss Charming. I'll take you to the dance in town tonight, if you'd like to go.

MISS C.: (*bewildered*) But there must be a mis —

IKE: (*wrathfully*) I asked her first, you big big nothinus.

ABE: (*sneering*) So what?

IKE: This what. (*Draws back and hits him.*)

ANN: Why, you — (*They begin to fight.*)

MISS C.: (*rising in alarm*) Here, stop, stop! Stop it! You've made a mistake. I don't know whom you took me for, I'm sure, but I'm not going anywhere with either of you. I was simply driving by your house and stopped to inquire the road to Badger Hollow. But since I seem to have caused such a commotion, I'll go and inquire elsewhere. I hope you gentlemen will treat strangers more courteously in the future. (*Exit right, very coldly.* ABE and IKE, sitting on the floor, stare after her, then, in dejection, at each other.)

ABE: Well, that's that.

IKE: I knew it was too good to be true. (*They rise.*)

ABE: You'd better do the dishes.

IKE: It's your turn to do the dishes.

ABE: It's nothing of the — oh, never mind. We do them together. (*They begin slowly and do remove the dishes and the curtain falls.*)

CURTAIN