

(Snapping two pieces together, a tiny fanfare.)

Ta dah!

(Calling upstairs.)

The first official coupling, Althea!

(Into phone.)

Sooooo – when you get this message, tell Connie to call me. I need to find out what her plans are for the evening. Oh, and tell her I want to go to Venice. We can take a boat. We never did have a proper honeymoon, you know. See ya, sis.

(He hangs up. To himself, regarding the puzzle.)

That's one small step for man, one giant leap for Le Grand Canal of Venice. *Le* is French. What's Italian? Il Canal Grandatorri!

(He laughs to himself.)

I'm hungry. Mmm, cheese.

(He calls upstairs.)

Hey Althea, send that paper boy out for pizza!

(A moment later, ALTHEA enters, accompanied by MATTIE PLESHETTE. MATTIE is special in ways that will soon be revealed.)

START

ALTHEA. It wasn't the paper boy. It was my next-door neighbor Madeline Pleshette. She likes to be called Mattie, don't you, dear?

MATTIE. I was once called Maidenform. That's a bra.

LEIF. Nice to meet you, Mattie. I'm Leif.

MATTIE. Hello, it's nice to meet *you*, Leif.

ALTHEA. Mattie likes to work puzzles, don't you, Mattie?

MATTIE. I do. I do like to work puzzles.

(The two women move toward the puzzle and begin working on it, alongside LEIF.)

LEIF. *(To MATTIE.)* Do you live in the big Tudor house or the other one with the arches?

MATTIE. I live in the one with the arches. Although I actually live in the room over the garage. It's semi-detached. That's what they say: it's a semi-attached garage with a room over it for Mattie. I have kitchen privileges. I only have a hot plate in my room. It is just one room. It doesn't have a kitchen. I keep my mayonnaise in the big kitchen in the house with the arches.

ALTHEA. *(To MATTIE.)* Dear, what did I tell you about giving people more information than is necessary?

MATTIE. Oh, did I just do that?

ALTHEA. *(Nodding, gently.)* A person might prefer to hear such things sprinkled through a conversation as he gets to know you – not, perhaps, offered up all at once.

MATTIE. Oh yes. You're right.

LEIF. It's okay. I don't mind.

ALTHEA. I'm teaching Mattie social skills. Many things are new to her.

MATTIE. *(To ALTHEA.)* Does this mean I have to wait to tell him about my cat?

ALTHEA. Why don't you ask him?

MATTIE. *(To LEIF.)* I have a cat. Would you like to know some things about him?

LEIF. *(Now catching on that MATTIE is "different".)* Yes. I'm very interested in cats.

MATTIE. He's a stray. I picked him up the very day I moved into the garage room. I pulled him out of a dumpster over on McAdams Street. He was eating green bacon. He was very happy to come home with me. His name is Mr. Puss.

LEIF. (*Not judgmentally.*) That's an interesting name.

MATTIE. It was either going to be Miss Kitty if he was a boy, or Mr. Puss if he was a girl.

ALTHEA. Dear, I think you got that backwards.

(*To LEIF.*)

Mattie has only lived alone for a few weeks. But she's doing very well, aren't you, dear?

MATTIE. (*Proudly.*) I have steam heat.

ALTHEA. Mattie came over to give me a potholder she made in one of her classes. I asked her if she liked to work jigsaw puzzles.

MATTIE. (*To LEIF.*) I came over to give Althea a potholder which I made in arts and crafts, and she asked me if I liked to work jigsaw puzzles and I said yes-I-did, and she brought me down here to where you are.

ALTHEA. Honey, you're giving Leif too much information again. You were, in fact, repeating all the information I'd already given him.

MATTIE. I didn't need to do that, did I? **END**

(*To LEIF.*)

Was your father's name "Tree"?

LEIF. (*Smiling.*) No. My name is spelled a little different from the kind of leaf you're thinking about.

MATTIE. Do you have a family tree? I hear that everyone has a family tree. Except me. I was raised by nuns.