**THE MATCHMAKER – Plot Synopsis (spoiler alert!)**

**Act 1**

**As the play opens, it is the early 1880s. The setting is Yonkers, New York, at the home of Horace Vandergelder, a wealthy storeowner and widower of advanced age. Vandergelder is getting a haircut from Joe, the local barber, while speaking with Ambrose Kemper, a thirty-year-old artist who hopes to marry Vandergelder’s niece, Ermengarde. The cranky, curmudgeonly Vandergelder firmly objects to this proposed marriage, though Ambrose insists that it is not ultimately Vandergelder’s decision. Vandergelder claims that Emengarde has already left town, but won’t say where she’s gone. Then, Vandergelder’s elderly maid Gertrude immediately spoils this, by announcing the address in New York City where Ermengarde will be staying after she leaves on the train later that day; Vandergelder, who is also about to travel to New York, is sending her to stay with Flora Van Huysen, a family friend, to keep her away from Ambrose, but now Ambrose knows this “secret,” much to Vandergelder’s irritation. Vandergelder is himself planning to propose to a woman in the city. He intends for his chief clerk, Cornelius Hackl, and assistant, Barnaby Tucker, to look after his store while he’s out of town.**

**Ermengarde enters and pleads with her uncle to let her marry Ambrose, insisting that she loves him. Vandergelder is unsympathetic and sends her on her way to New York. A man of fifty named Malachi enters next, and asks Vandergelder for a job as an apprentice. Malachi claims to have extensive experience in a wide variety of professions, though all only in short stints. He produces a rather tepid letter of reference from Vandergelder’s former business partner. Vandergelder reluctantly hires him, and tells him to leave right away for New York to book a room for him at the Central Hotel.**

**Ambrose and Ermengarde meet in secret. He tells her that they should get married without Vandergelder’s permission, but Ermengarde dislikes the thought of “eloping.” Just then, Mrs. Dolly Levi, a widower and family friend of the Vandergelders, arrives (by train from New York City), overhearing their conversation. She tells them that she will help them receive Vandergelder’s blessing to marry, but they will need to follow all of her instructions. She says that rather than taking Ermengarde to Miss Van Huysen’s home, she will instead take her to her own residence. She tells Ambrose to come by her house at 5:30, and from there they will go together to the Harmonia Gardens, a fine-dining restaurant. When Mrs. Levi enters to meet Vandergelder, he tells her right away that he has decided to marry Irene Molloy, a widow. Mrs. Levi expresses some disappointment, claiming to have found “another girl” for him to consider: a young woman named Ernestina Simple, who is romantically smitten with elderly men, an excellent cook and housekeeper, and extremely frugal—all qualities that immensely appeal to the miserly Vandergelder. He agrees to have dinner with Miss Simple before proposing to Mrs. Molloy. The persuasive, fast-talking Mrs. Levi also convinces Vandergelder to lend her fifty dollars to (she claims) settle a lawsuit that will make her “a very rich woman,” owner of “half of Long Island.” They agree to meet for dinner at the Harmonia Gardens restaurant, after Vandergelder has paid another visit to Mrs. Molloy.**

**Barnaby and Cornelius complain that they never get any time off working for Vandergelder. Cornelius suggests that they create a minor disaster that would necessitate closing the store, and then go together to New York City to have a bit of fun while Vandergelder is away. Barnaby is very reluctant, but is persuaded by the older Cornelius. As Ermengarde and Mrs. Levi depart for New York, Mrs. Levi hints (to the audience) that she actually intends to marry Vandergelder. Cornelius and Barnaby detonate some rotten cans of tomatoes in the store—their excuse to temporarily close it—as the first act ends.**

**Act 2**

**In Mrs. Molloy’s hat shop, in New York City, Mrs. Molloy is telling her assistant, Minnie Fay, that she plans to marry Vandergelder. She admits that she doesn’t love him, but marrying him would allow her to leave the millinery business, which she has come to dislike. As they chat, they notice two men standing outside, who appear as if they may come into the store. Soon, Cornelius and Barnaby enter in a panic, having spotted Vandergelder with Mrs. Levi nearby outside. They decide that they’ll pretend to be wealthy customers to impress the women working at the hat shop. They tell Mrs. Molloy that “money’s no object…none at all,” and that they’re visiting from Yonkers. Cornelius is clearly attracted to her, and invites her to come to Yonkers sometime for him to show her around the town. She replies that she already has an acquaintance from Yonkers: Vandergelder. Cornelius and Barnaby are shocked, but pretend not to know Vandergelder.**

**When Vandergelder approaches the store, Cornelius and Barnaby frantically hide in the shop. Cornelius begs Mrs. Molloy to help them “just this once,” promising that he’ll explain later. Vandergelder and Mrs. Levi enter and greet Mrs. Molloy. Vandergelder mentions that he thought he’d seen two male customers enter before hem, but Mrs. Molloy insists that there were no men in the shop. She brings them into the workroom to allow Cornelius and Barnaby to leave unnoticed, but they don’t and Cornelius admits that he “likes Mrs. Molloy a lot.” As they talk, Mrs. Levi suddenly re-enters and spots them. They plead with her not to tell Vandergelder. Cornelius tells Mrs. Levi of his instant attraction to Mrs. Molloy.**

**They fall silent as Vandergelder re-enters with Mrs. Molloy. When Vandergelder says that he’d like for her to come to Yonkers, she mentions that she knows someone else “quite well-to-do” from Yonkers—Cornelius Hackl. Vandergelder is perplexed and demands to know how Mrs. Molloy knows his clerk. Mrs. Levi interjects, making up an elaborate story about how Cornelius is leading a double life, and is very well-known and popular in New York, how he comes often to the city: “by night…he’s at the opera; at the great restaurants; in all the fashionable homes…The fact is, he’s the wittiest, gayest, naughtiest, most delightful man in New York.” Vandergelder is stunned but still denies this is possible. She also claims that he’s secretly rich, through old family money. Minnie enters from the workroom and opens a cupboard; she screams that there’s a man inside. Vandergelder insists that he’ll get the man out, but Mrs. Molloy and Mrs. Levi try to convince Minnie and Vandergelder that it was nothing. Then, after they all hear a sneeze coming from the cupboard, Mrs. Molloy gives up and admits to Vandergelder, “Yes, there is a man in there. I’ll explain it all to you another time.” She says goodbye and tries to lead him out of her shop. Vandergelder is very upset and tells Mrs. Molloy that he “shan’t trouble [her] again, and vice versa.” After he leaves, Cornelius and Barnaby come out, and Mrs. Molloy insists that, after all the trouble they’ve caused, they should at least take her and Minnie out to dinner at a fine restaurant.**

**Act 3**

**Vandergelder arrives with Malachi at the Harmonia Gardens restaurant. He tells Rudolph, a snobby waiter, that he needs a table for three and that he wants a chicken and a bottle of wine. Mrs. Levi arrives with Ermengarde and Ambrose, which makes Vandergelder furious. Ermengarde is worried that what she’s doing is improper. Mrs. Levi tries to assure her that it’s fine, and promises that she’ll take her to Miss Van Huysen’s house after dinner. Ambrose tries to convince Ermengarde that if she goes there, she’ll be back under the control of her uncle, an “old man with one foot in the grave”; Vandergelder and Malachi, meanwhile, are eavesdropping on this conversation. Mrs. Levi notices, and begins to speak very positively of Vandergelder. She directs Ambrose and Ermengarde upstairs to a private room, “just meant for shy timid girls like Ermengarde.” Vandergelder instructs Malachi and the cabman to deliver Ermengarde and Ambrose to Miss Van Huysen’s house as soon as they return downstairs. He writes a note explaining the situation, to be delivered to Miss Van Huysen. After Malachi and the cabman exit, Mrs. Molloy, Minnie, Cornelius, and Barnaby enter. Mrs. Molloy and Cornelius order from Rudolph. They’re brought a bottle of champagne and Barnaby raises a toast “to all the ladies in the world…may I get to know them better.” Mrs. Molloy gives him a kiss. Rudolph begins setting the table beside them on the veranda. Mrs. Molloy tries to stop him, hoping to keep the veranda to themselves. Malachi enters and tells them that his employer already reserved this table. They begin arguing, but Rudolph tries to ease the tension by suggesting that he set up a screen between their tables. Mrs. Molloy protests this, but when Cornelius and Barnaby see that it’s Vandergelder who is coming to the other table, they say that they think the screen is a good idea after all. As Malachi helps Vandergelder remove his coat, his money purse falls out. When Malachi finds it, he thinks that it must’ve been dropped by Cornelius while they were bickering about the table and the screen. He gives it to Cornelius, who is amazed, as before this he was unsure how he would possibly pay the restaurant bill. When Cornelius returns to the table, he announces that he is going to tell the truth. He explains that almost none of what Mrs. Levi said about him was true. He also tells them that Vandergelder, his boss, is sitting on the other side of the screen. Mrs. Molloy refuses to let any of this ruin her evening out, and the group begins to sing merrily.**

**On the other side of the screen, Mrs. Levi joins Vandergelder. He asks where Miss Simple is, and Mrs. Levi explains that she ran off and got married just that afternoon. Mrs. Levi tells their waiter, August, that Vandergelder, being Yonkers’ “most prominent citizen,” deserves the very best in food and service. She then peeks on the other side of the curtain. Cornelius greets her. She tells Vandergelder that it’s “just some city sparks entertaining their girls.” He accuses her of “always putting [her] nose into other people’s affairs,” and they begin to quarrel. She announces that she has “no intention” of marrying him. He is shocked by this, as he’d never suggested as much, but she insists that he had been “hinting” “for some time.” She explains that she would be just the right woman to set his affairs in order, given her great talent for management—but insists that someone else will have to do it. He vehemently denies that his affairs are out of order. She points to the fact that his niece is upstairs now with her would-be beau, rather than at the house where Vandergelder sent her, and that his clerks are “skipping around New York,” rather than tending his store in Yonkers. In fact, she tells him, they’re just now on the other side of the screen. He doesn’t believe her, and says he’s leaving to go to Miss Van Huysen’s house, then back to his hotel. As he tries to pay their bill, he realizes he’s lost his purse. He is panicked. Cornelius overhears and realizes that it’s Vandergelder’s purse he’s been given.**

**Mrs. Levi persuades Vandergelder to dance with her, but as they do they bump into Cornelius dancing with Mrs. Molloy. Vandergelder tells Cornelius that he’s fired. He looks for Barnaby. He doesn’t spot him—Barnaby, disguising himself, is wearing Minnie’s hat, coat, and veil—but says that he is “discharged,” too. When he sees Ermengarde, he shouts that he’ll lock her up for the rest of her life. She faints into Ambrose’s arms. Mrs. Levi, laughing, tells Vandergelder that this is proof that his affairs are out of order and asks now whether he’ll marry her, but he still refuses. Mrs. Levi, while still laughing, curses — “Damn!” — as the third act ends.**

**Act 4**

**At Miss Van Huysen’s house, the wealthy spinster is waiting eagerly for her expected visitor, worried that Ermengarde hasn’t yet arrived. She tells her cook that she’ll help the young lady to marry whomever she wishes, rather than be controlled by “that cruel uncle of hers.” They hear a carriage arrive. But Malachi and the cabman have brought Cornelius and Barnaby (the latter still in women’s clothing), mistaking them for Ermengarde and Ambrose. After reading Vandergelder’s note, Miss Van Huysen makes the same mistake. She invites “Ermengarde” (Barnaby) to take a bath. Cornelius and Barnaby try to figure out how to escape—Malachi and the cabman are waiting guard until Vandergelder arrives—as the doorbell rings again. This time it is Ermengarde and Ambrose, but the cook doesn’t believe that they are who they claim to be. As they wait for Miss Van Huysen, Ermengarde suggests that Ambrose pretend he’s Cornelius Hackl, her uncle’s clerk sent by Vandergelder to escort his niece to New York. When Miss Van Huysen enters, she is perplexed that two different people are claiming to be Ermengarde. Because the other Ermengarde came with “the man she’s in love with,” and this one is with “Cornelius Hackl,” Vandergelder’s clerk, Miss Van Huysen says that she still believes the first Ermengarde (Barnaby) is the genuine one.**

**Another cab shows up with more guests. Mrs. Levi enters with Mrs. Molloy and Minnie. She explains that Vandergelder is still outside trying somehow to pay the cab that took them there. Mrs. Molloy, now holding Vandergelder’s purse, offers to come down and pay the bill. Moments later, Vandergelder enters in a huff and becomes more upset at the mistaken identities of the people inside the house, calling them all “dogs and scoundrels.” Miss Van Huysen forces him to shake hands and get along for now, and reluctantly he does. He goes into the kitchen to have coffee with the others, while Mrs. Levi speaks aloud to her deceased husband, explaining in a long monologue that she’s going to marry Vandergelder for his money. When Vandergelder returns with a cup of coffee for Mrs. Levi, he tells her that he’s forgiven everyone and even made Cornelius his partner. He then asks her to marry him. She says that that she’ll only consent to marrying him if he permits her to live, and spend, freely. He agrees. She returns his lost purse to him, but he tells her to keep it. She is taken aback and responds with real affection for him. Barnaby enters and announces that Cornelius is going to marry Mrs. Molloy. Vandergelder replies that he is going to marry Mrs. Levi, as the play concludes on a celebratory note.**

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