

The Miser

by

Moliere

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The Miser

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Persons Represented

HARPAGON, father to CLÉANTE, in love with MARIANNE.

CLÉANTE, HARPAGON'S son, lover to MARIANNE.

VALÈRE, son to ANSELME, and lover to ÉLISE.

ANSELME, father to VALÈRE and MARIANNE.

MASTER SIMON, broker.

MASTER JACQUES, cook and coachman to HARPAGON.

LA FLÈCHE, valet to CLÉANTE.

BRINDAVOINE, and LA MERLUCHE, lackeys to HARPAGON.

A MAGISTRATE and his CLERK.

ÉLISE, daughter to HARPAGON.

MARIANNE, daughter to ANSELME.

FROSINE, an intriguing woman.

MISTRESS CLAUDE, servant to HARPAGON.

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The scene is at PARIS, in HARPAGON'S house.

ACT I

SCENE I.--VALÈRE, ÉLISE.

VAL. What, dear Élise! you grow sad after having given me such dear tokens of your love; and I see you sigh in the midst of my joy! Can you regret having made me happy? and do you repent of the engagement which my love has forced from you?

ELI. No, Valère, I do not regret what I do for you; I feel carried on by too delightful a power, and I do not even wish that things should be otherwise than they are. Yet, to tell you the truth, I am very anxious about the consequences; and I greatly fear that I love you more than I should.

VAL. What can you possibly fear from the affection you have shown me?

ELI. Everything; the anger of my father, the reproaches of my family, the censure of the world, and, above all, Valère, a change in your heart! I fear that cruel coldness with which your sex so often repays the too warm proofs of an innocent love.

VAL. Alas! do not wrong me thus; do not judge of me by others. Think me capable of everything, Élise, except of falling short of what I owe to you. I love you too much for that; and my love will be as lasting as my life!

ELI. Ah! Valère, all men say the same thing; all men are alike in their words; their actions only show the difference that exists between them.

VAL. Then why not wait for actions, if by them alone you can judge of the truthfulness of my heart? Do not suffer your anxious fears to mislead you, and to wrong me. Do not let an unjust suspicion destroy the happiness which is to me dearer than life; but give me time to show you by a thousand proofs the sincerity of my affection.

ELI. Alas! how easily do we allow ourselves to be persuaded by those we love. I believe you, Valère; I feel sure that your heart is utterly incapable of deceiving me, that your love is sincere, and that you will ever remain faithful to me. I will no longer doubt that happiness is near. If I grieve, it will only be over the difficulties of our position, and the possible censures of the world.

VAL. But why even this fear?

ELI. Oh, Valère! if everybody knew you as I do, I should not have much to fear. I find in you enough to justify all I do for you; my heart knows all your merit, and feels, moreover, bound to you by deep gratitude. How can I forget that horrible moment when we met for the first time? Your generous courage in risking your own life to save mine from the fury of the waves; your tender care afterwards; your constant attentions and your ardent love, which neither time nor difficulties can lessen! For me you neglect your

parents and your country; you give up your own position in life to be a servant of my father! How can I resist the influence that all this has over me? Is it not enough to justify in my eyes my engagement to you? Yet, who knows if it will be enough to justify it in the eyes of others? and how can I feel sure that my motives will be understood?

VAL. You try in vain to find merit in what I have done; it is by my love alone that I trust to deserve you. As for the scruples you feel, your father himself justifies you but too much before the world; and his avarice and the distant way in which he lives with his children might authorise stranger things still. Forgive me, my dear Élise, for speaking thus of your father before you; but you know that, unfortunately, on this subject no good can be said of him. However, if I can find my parents, as I fully hope I shall, they will soon be favourable to us. I am expecting news of them with great impatience; but if none comes I will go in search of them myself.

ELI. Oh no! Valère, do not leave me, I entreat you. Try rather to ingratiate yourself in my father's favour.

VAL. You know how much I wish it, and you can see how I set about it. You know the skilful manoeuvres I have had to use in order to introduce myself into his service; under what a mask of sympathy and conformity of tastes I disguise my own feelings to please him; and what a part I play to acquire his affection. I succeed wonderfully well, and I feel that to obtain favour with men, there are no better means than to pretend to be of their way of thinking, to fall in with their maxims, to praise their defects, and to applaud all their doings. One need not fear to overdo it, for however gross the flattery, the most cunning are easily duped; there is nothing so impertinent or ridiculous which they will not believe, provided it be well seasoned with praise. Honesty suffers, I acknowledge; but when we have need of men, we may be allowed without blame to adapt ourselves to their mode of thought; and if we have no other hope of success but through such stratagem, it is not after all the fault of those who flatter, but the fault of those who wish to be flattered.

ELI. Why do you not try also to gain my brother's goodwill, in case the servant should betray our secret?

VAL. I am afraid I cannot humour them both. The temper of the father is so different from that of the son that it would be difficult to be the confidant of both at the same time. Rather try your brother yourself; make use of the love that exists between you to enlist him in our cause. I leave you, for I see him coming. Speak to him, sound him, and see how far we can trust him.

ELI. I greatly fear I shall never have the courage to speak to him of my secret.

SCENE II.--CLÉANTE, ÉLISE,

CLE. I am very glad to find you alone, sister. I longed to speak to you and to tell you a secret.

ELI. I am quite ready to hear you, brother. What is it you have to tell me?

CLE. Many things, sister, summed up in one word--love.

ELI. You love?

CLE. Yes, I love. But, before I say more, let me tell you that I know I depend on my father, and that the name of son subjects me to his will; that it would be wrong to engage ourselves without the consent of the authors of our being; that heaven has made them the masters of our affections, and that it is our duty not to dispose of ourselves but in accordance to their wish; that their judgment is not biassed by their being in love themselves; that they are, therefore, much more likely not to be deceived by appearances, and to judge better what is good for us; that we ought to trust their experience rather than the passion which blinds us; and that the rashness of youth often carries us to the very brink of dangerous abysses. I know all this, my sister, and I tell it you to spare you the trouble of saying it to me, for my love will not let me listen to anything, and I pray you to spare me your remonstrances.

ELI. Have you engaged yourself, brother, to her you love?

CLE. No, but I have determined to do so; and I beseech you once more not to bring forward any reason to dissuade me from it.

ELI. Am I such a very strange person, brother?

CLE. No, dear sister; but you do not love. You know not the sweet power that love has upon our hearts; and I dread your wisdom.

ELI. Alas! my brother, let us not speak of my wisdom. There are very few people in this world who do not lack wisdom, were it only once in their lifetime; and if I opened my heart to you, perhaps you would think me less wise than you are yourself.

CLE. Ah! would to heaven that your heart, like mine....

ELI. Let us speak of you first, and tell me whom it is you love.

CLE. A young girl who has lately come to live in our neighbourhood, and who seems made to inspire love in all those who behold her. Nature, my dear sister, has made nothing more lovely; and I felt another man the moment I saw her. Her name is Marianne, and she lives with a good, kind mother, who is almost always ill, and for whom the dear girl shows the greatest affection. She waits upon her, pities and comforts her with a tenderness that would touch you to the very soul. Whatever she undertakes is done in the most charming way; and in all her actions shine a wonderful grace, a most winning gentleness, an adorable modesty, a ... ah! my sister, how I wish you had but seen her.

ELI. I see many things in what you tell me, dear brother; and it is sufficient for me to know that you love her for me to understand what she is.

CLE. I have discovered, without their knowing it, that they are not in very good circumstances, and that, although they live with the greatest care, they have barely enough to cover their expenses. Can you imagine, my sister, what happiness it must be to improve the condition of those we love; skilfully to bring about some relief to the modest wants of a virtuous family? And think what grief it is for me to find myself deprived of this great joy through the avarice of a father, and for it to be impossible for me to give any proof of my love to her who is all in all to me.

ELI. Yes, I understand, dear brother, what sorrow this must be to you.

CLE. It is greater, my sister, than you can believe. For is there anything more cruel than this mean economy to which we are subjected? this strange penury in which we are made to pine? What good will it do us to have a fortune if it only comes to us when we are not able to enjoy it; if now to provide for my daily maintenance I get into debt on every side; if both you and I are reduced daily to beg the help of tradespeople in order to have decent clothes to wear? In short, I wanted to speak to you that you might help me to sound my father concerning my present feelings; and if I find him opposed to them, I am determined to go and live elsewhere with this most charming girl, and to make the best of what Providence offers us. I am trying everywhere to raise money for this purpose; and if your circumstances, dear sister, are like mine, and our father opposes us, let us both leave him, and free ourselves from the tyranny in which his hateful avarice has for so long held us.

ELI. It is but too true that every day he gives us more and more reason to regret the death of our mother, and that....

CLE. I hear his voice. Let us go a little farther and finish our talk. We will afterwards join our forces to make a common attack on his hard and unkind heart.

SCENE III.--HARPAGON, LA FLÈCHE.

HAR. Get out of here, this moment; and let me have no more of your prating. Now then, be gone out of my house, you sworn pickpocket, you veritable gallows' bird.

LA FL. (aside). I never saw anything more wicked than this cursed old man; and I truly believe, if I may be allowed to say so, that he is possessed with a devil.

HAR. What are you muttering there between your teeth?

LA FL. Why do you send me away?

HAR. You dare to ask me my reasons, you scoundrel? Out with you, this moment, before I give you a good thrashing.

LA FL. What have I done to you?

HAR. Done this, that I wish you to be off.

LA FL. My master, your son, gave me orders to wait for him.

HAR. Go and wait for him in the street, then; out with you; don't stay in my house, straight and stiff as a sentry, to observe what is going on, and to make your profit of everything. I won't always have before me a spy on all my affairs; a treacherous scamp, whose cursed eyes watch all my actions, covet all I possess, and ferret about in every corner to see if there is anything to steal.

LA FL. How the deuce could one steal anything from you? Are you a man likely to be robbed when you put every possible thing under lock and key, and mount guard day and night?

HAR. I will lock up whatever I think fit, and mount guard when and where I please. Did you ever see such spies as are set upon me to take note of everything I do? (Aside) I tremble for fear he should suspect something of my money. (Aloud) Now, aren't you a fellow to give rise to stories about my having money hid in my house?

LA FL. You have some money hid in your house?

HAR. No, scoundrel! I do not say that. (Aside) I am furious! (Aloud) I only ask if out of mischief you do not spread abroad the report that I have some?

LA FL. Oh! What does it matter whether you have money, or whether you have not, since it is all the same to us?

HAR. (raising his hand to give LA FLÈCHE a blow). Oh! oh! You want to argue, do you? I will give you, and quickly too, some few of these arguments about your ears. Get out of the house, I tell you once more.

LA FL. Very well; very well. I am going.

HAR. No, wait; are you carrying anything away with you?

LA FL. What can I possibly carry away?

HAR. Come here, and let me see. Show me your hands.

LA FL. There they are.

HAR. The others.

LA FL. The others?

HAR. Yes.

LA FL. There they are.

HAR. (pointing to LA FLÈCHE'S breeches). Have you anything hid in here?

LA FL. Look for yourself.

HAR. (feeling the knees of the breeches). These wide knee- breeches are convenient receptacles of stolen goods; and I wish a pair of them had been hanged.

LA FL. (aside). Ah! how richly such a man deserves what he fears, and what joy it would be to me to steal some of his....

HAR. Eh?

LA FL. What?

HAR. What is it you talk of stealing?

LA FL. I say that you feel about everywhere to see if I have been stealing anything.

HAR. And I mean to do so too. (He feels in LA FLÈCHE'S pockets).

LA FL. Plague take all misers and all miserly ways!

HAR. Eh? What do you say?

LA FL. What do I say?

HAR. Yes. What is it you say about misers and miserly ways.

LA FL. I say plague take all misers and all miserly ways.

HAR. Of whom do you speak?

LA FL. Of misers.

HAR. And who are they, these misers?

LA FL. Villains and stingy wretches!

HAR. But what do you mean by that?

LA FL. Why do you trouble yourself so much about what I say?

HAR. I trouble myself because I think it right to do so.

LA FL. Do you think I am speaking about you?

HAR. I think what I think; but I insist upon your telling me to whom you speak when you say that.

LA FL. To whom I speak? I am speaking to the inside of my hat.

HAR. And I will, perhaps, speak to the outside of your head.

LA FL. Would you prevent me from cursing misers?

HAR. No; but I will prevent you from prating and from being insolent. Hold your tongue, will you?

LA FL. I name nobody.

HAR. Another word, and I'll thrash you.

LA FL. He whom the cap fits, let him wear it.

HAR. Will you be silent?

LA FL. Yes; much against my will.

HAR. Ah! ah!

LA FL. (showing HARPAGON one of his doublet pockets). Just look, here is one more pocket. Are you satisfied?

HAR. Come, give it up to me without all that fuss.

LA FL. Give you what?

HAR. What you have stolen from me.

LA FL. I have stolen nothing at all from you.

HAR. Are you telling the truth?

LA FL. Yes.

HAR. Good-bye, then, and now you may go to the devil.

LA FL. (aside). That's a nice way of dismissing anyone.

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