The Miser (L’Avare)

Stingy father gets his comeuppance, and his family at long last finds happiness. . . .

by Molière, and adapted by Carol D. Wise

Characters

HARPA GON, the miser
CLÉANTE, Harpagon’s son, in love with Marianne
ÉLISE, Harpagon’s daughter
VALÈRE, in love with Élise
MARIANNE, in love with Cléante
FROSINE, an intriguing woman
MASTER JACQUES, Harpagon’s cook and coachman
LA FLÈCHE, Cléante’s valet
ANSELME, father to Valère and Marianne


AT RISE: VALÈRE and ÉLISE are sitting on loveseat. ÉLISE seems unsettled, anxious.

VALÈRE (Taking her hands in his): Dear Élise, I see you sigh in the midst of my joy. Do you repent of our engagement?

ÉLISE: No, not at all, my love, I am just very anxious about the consequences. I fear my father’s anger, the reproaches of my family, the censure of the world, and, above all a change in your heart!

VALÈRE: Élise, my love will be as lasting as my life! Give me time to show you the sincerity of my affection.

ÉLISE: Oh, Valère, my heart knows all your merit. How can I forget your generous courage in risking your own life to save me from drowning, your constant attentions, and your ardent love. For me, you give up your own position in life to be a servant of my father.

VALÈRE: It is by my love alone that I try to deserve you. . . your father’s greed prevents our honesty. You know the skillful maneuvers I have had to use in order to ingratiate myself with him. I disguise my own feelings to please him.

ÉLISE: Why don’t you try to gain my brother’s good will?
VALÈRE: It would help if you could enlist him in our cause, Élise. (Looks off left) I see him coming now. Speak to him, sound him, and see how far we can trust him. (VALÈRE exits quickly right. CLÉANTE enters left.)

CLÉANTE: I am glad to find you alone, Élise. I must tell you a secret.

ÉLISE: What is it, Cléante?

CLÉANTE: Many things, sister, summed up in one word—love.

ÉLISE (Smiling): You are in love? Tell me whom it is you love.

CLÉANTE: Her name is Marianne, and she lives with a good, kind mother for whom she shows the greatest affection. She waits upon her, pities, and comforts her with a tenderness that would touch you to the very soul. Ah! How I wish you could see her!

ÉLISE: It is sufficient for me to know that you love her.

CLÉANTE: They are not in very good circumstances. Although they live with the greatest care, they have barely enough to cover their expenses. It grieves me to find myself unable to provide for them because of Father’s greed. What good is our fortune if it only comes to us when we are not able to enjoy it?

ÉLISE: I know your feelings.

CLÉANTE: I wanted to speak to you so you might help me speak to Father. I am determined to go and live elsewhere and make the best of what Providence offers Marianne and me.

ÉLISE: Every day Father gives us another reason to regret Mother’s death.

CLÉANTE (Suddenly): I hear his voice. Let us go finish our talk, then join forces to attack his hard and unkind heart. (He and ÉLISE exit left. HARPAGON enters right with LA FLECHE.)

HARPAGON: Be gone out of my house, you sworn pickpocket, you veritable gallows’ bird.

LA FLECHE: Why do you send me away? My master, your son, gave me orders to wait for him.

HARPAGON: Go and wait for him in the street, then; I won’t have you spy on all my affairs, covet all I possess, and ferret about in every corner to see if there is anything to steal.

LA FLECHE: How the deuce could one steal anything from you? You put every possible thing under lock and key, and mount guard day and night.

HARPAGON: I will lock up whatever I think fit and mount guard when and where I please. You are just the fellow to spread stories about my having money hidden in my house.

LA FLECHE (Excited): You have money hidden in your house?

HARPAGON: No, scoundrel! I only ask you do not spread abroad the report that I have some.

LA FLECHE: What does it matter whether you have money or not, since it is all the same to us? (HARPAGON raises his fist.) Very well; very well. I am going.

HARPAGON: No, wait! Are you carrying anything away with you?

LA FLECHE (Extending his arms): What can I possibly carry away?

HARPAGON: Come here, and let me see. (Feeling the knees of LA FLECHE’s
breeches) Have you anything hidden in here? These wide knee-breeches are convenient receptacles of stolen goods. (He feels in LA FLÈCHE’s pockets.)

LA FLÈCHE: Plague take all misers and all miserly ways!

HARPA GON: To whom do you speak when you say that?

LA FLÈCHE: I name nobody. He whom the cap fits, let him wear it.

HARPA GON: Goodbye, then. Now you may go to the devil. (La Flèche exits right.) Happy is the man who has all his cash well invested and who needs not keep by him more than he wants for his daily expenses. (ÉLISE and CLÉANTE enter left, whispering together. HARPA GON does not at first see them.) I hardly know whether I did right to bury in my garden the ten thousand crowns paid to me yesterday. Ten thousand crowns in gold is a sum sufficiently—(Suddenly noticing ÉLISE and CLÉANTE) Good heavens! What do you want?

CLÉANTE: Nothing, Father.

HARPA GON (Suspiciously): Have you been here long?

ÉLISE: We have only just come.

HARPA GON: Did you hear...?

CLÉANTE (Innocently): What, Father?

HARPA GON: What I was just saying.

CLÉANTE, ÉLISE (Quickly): No.

HARPA GON: I was only talking to myself about the trouble one has nowadays to raise any money. One is a fortunate man who has ten thousand crowns in his house. Would that I had these ten thousand crowns! I should not have to complain that the times are bad.

CLÉANTE: Everyone knows that you are well enough off.

HARPA GON: How? Those who say it are liars. Such talk and your extravagant expenses will be the cause that someday thieves will come and cut my throat, in the belief that I am made of gold.

CLÉANTE: Father, Élise and I have another matter about which we wish to speak with you.

HARPA GON: And I also have something to tell you both.

CLÉANTE: We wanted to speak to you about marriage, Father.

HARPA GON: The very thing I wish to speak to you about. (To CLÉANTE) Do you know a young person, called Marianne, who lives not far from here?

CLÉANTE (Surprised): Why yes, I do.

HARPA GON: Well, my son, how do you like the girl?

CLÉANTE (Hesitant): She is very charming.

HARPA GON: She would form a very desirable match?

CLÉANTE (Nodding): Very desirable.

HARPA GON: And a husband might live very happily with her?

CLÉANTE: I have not the least doubt about it.

HARPA GON: Unfortunately, she has not the wealth we might reasonably expect.

CLÉANTE: Oh, Father, riches are of lit-
tle importance when one is marrying a virtuous woman.

HAR PAGON: Well, I must say I am very much pleased that you agree with me, for I have made up my mind to marry her, provided she has some dowry.

CLÉANTE (Stunned): You?

HAR PAGON: Yes, I. Why do you look so puzzled?

CLÉANTE: Ah—I—I feel a sudden dizziness. Excuse me. (Hurries out right)

HAR PAGON (To ÉLISE): Your brother has no more stamina than a chicken. I have found for him a certain widow, of whom I heard this morning, and you I shall give to Mr. Anselme.

ÉLISE (Alarmed): Mr. Anselme?

HAR PAGON: Yes, a prudent man, who is not more than fifty. Everybody speaks of his riches.

ÉLISE (Curtsying): I have no wish to marry, Father, if you please.

HAR PAGON (Imitating ÉLISE): And I, my girl, wish you to marry, if you please—this very evening.

ÉLISE (Gasping): This evening? You will never force me to do such a thing.

HAR PAGON: Did ever anyone hear a daughter speak in such a fashion to her father?

ÉLISE: But did ever anyone see a father marry his daughter after such a fashion?

HAR PAGON: It is a match against which nothing can be said, and I am perfectly sure that everybody will approve of my choice. (VALÈRE enters)

right.) Ah, my honorable servant Valère. Shall we make him judge in this affair?

ÉLISE: Willingly.

HAR PAGON: You will abide by what he says?

ÉLISE: Yes, whatever he thinks right, I will do.

HAR PAGON: Valère, we have chosen you to decide who is in the right, my daughter or I. I want her to marry tonight a good and rich husband, and she refuses. What do you say to that?

VALÈRE (Pausing): Er... what do I say to it?

HAR PAGON (Sharply): You say yes, right?

VALÈRE (Slowly): I say that I am, upon the whole, of your opinion, and that you cannot but be right; yet, perhaps, she is not altogether wrong and—

HAR PAGON: How so? Mr. Anselme is an excellent match; he is a nobleman, and a gentleman, too. Could she meet with anything more suitable?

VALÈRE: She might say that you are going rather fast and she needs a little time to consider.

HAR PAGON: It is an opportunity I must not allow to slip through my fingers. He agrees to take her without dowry.

VALÈRE: Without dowry? Ah! A more convincing reason could not be found. (ÉLISE gasps.) However, your daughter might believe that marriage is a serious affair that determines the happiness or misery of a whole life. Such an engagement ought not to be entered into without great consideration.
HAR PAGON: But did you understand—without dowry! How can I pass this up?

VALÈRE: Some might tell you that the wishes of a daughter are to be considered and a great disparity of age, disposition, and feelings could be the cause of much unpleasantness in a marriage.

HAR PAGON (Emphatically): Without dowry!

VALÈRE: Ah! There is no reply to that. Who in the world could think otherwise?

HAR PAGON: An honest fellow! Happy is he who can secure such a servant! (Sound of barking, right) Ah! (Alarmed) Someone must be in my garden! (Hurries off right)

ÉLISE: Surely, Valère, you are not serious when you speak to him in that manner?

VALÈRE: I must command his trust. For now pretend to comply with his wishes. You are much more likely to succeed in the end. We will think of something. (They exit left. After a few moments, HAR PAGON reenters right.)

HAR PAGON: Thank goodness. It was nothing. My treasure is safe. (Knock is heard on the door, left. HAR PAGON opens it to FROSINE.) Ah, Frosine!

FROSINE: Harpagon, how well you look! Never have I seen you looking more rosy, more hearty. Show me your hand. (Looks at his palm) Dear me, what a line of life there is there!

HAR PAGON (Studying his palm): What does it mean?

FROSINE: What does it mean? A hundred years; but no, one hundred and twenty! You will bury your children and your children’s children.

HAR PAGON: So much the better! (Lowers his voice) And what news of our affair?

FROSINE: I told the ladies every particular about you and I acquainted the mother with your intentions toward Marianne.

HAR PAGON (Eagerly): What did she answer?

FROSINE: She received your proposal with great joy. I told her that you wished for Marianne to come tonight to assist in the signing of the marriage contract for Élise and Mr. Anselme.

HAR PAGON: Have you spoken to the mother about the dowry she can give her daughter? For, after all, one does not marry a girl without her bringing something with her.

FROSINE: She is a girl who will bring you a clear twelve thousand francs a year.

HAR PAGON (Delighted): Twelve thousand francs a year?

FROSINE: Yes! She has been brought up with the strictest notions of frugality. She will have none of those splendid dresses and rich jewels, none of that sumptuous furniture in which girls like her indulge so extravagantly. Lastly, she has the deepest aversion to gambling. Easily this will bring you twelve thousand francs a year.

HAR PAGON: Yes, that’s not bad; but, after all, that calculation has nothing real in it. It is a farce to pretend to make up a dowry with all the expenses she will not run into. I could not give a receipt for what I do not receive; I must decidedly get something.

FROSINE: You will get enough! They have told me of some property in Naples.
HAR PAGO N: We shall have to see to that. But, Frosine, I do worry that the girl is young, and that a man of three-score, as I am, may not exactly suit her taste.

FROSINE: Oh, how you misjudge her! She wishes for a man sixty years old at least. Not more than six months ago on the very eve of being married, she broke off the match on learning that her lover was only fifty-six years of age and did not put on spectacles to sign the contract.

HAR PAGO N: I am very pleased to hear this. Has Marianne seen me yet? Has she not noticed me when I passed by?

FROSINE: No, but I gave her an exact description of your person, and I did not fail to make the most of your merit and show her what an advantage it would be to have a husband like you.

HAR PAGO N: You did right, and I thank you very much for it.

FROSINE: I have, sir, a small request to make to you. I am in danger of losing a lawsuit for want of a little money, and you can easily help me with it. If I lose it, I am forever ruined, but a very small sum will save me. (HARPAGON frowns and she changes tone.) I should like you to have seen the happiness Marianne felt when I spoke of you to her. (HARPAGON looks pleased again.) Joy sparkled in her eyes while I told her of all your good qualities; she is looking forward with the greatest impatience to the conclusion of the match. I beg of you, sir, to grant me the little financial assistance I ask of you. (HARPAGON again looks grave.) It will put me on my feet again, and I shall feel grateful to you forever.

HAR PAGO N (Quickly): Ah, I must go and finish my correspondence. We shall see each other again. (Exits right)
HARPAGON: What! Do you mean to feed a whole town?

VALÈRE (To JACQUES): Frugality should reign throughout the repast we give, and according to the saying of one of the ancients, “We must eat to live, and not live to eat.”

HARPAGON: Ah! How well the man speaks!

VALÈRE (To JACQUES): You had better let me manage dinner. I will see that it is all as it should be.

JACQUES (Snickering): So much the better; all the less work for me.

HARPAGON: You, Master Jacques, must clean my carriage and have my horses ready.

JACQUES: Upon my word, sir, your horses are not at all in a condition to stir. You make them keep such rigid fasts that they are mere shadows of horses.

VALÈRE: I shall arrange to use our neighbor Picard’s horses.

HARPAGON (Gushing): Valère, you are indispensable!

JACQUES (Mumbling): I can see that, whatever this man does, he curries favor and makes his court to you. I am indignant to see it all, and I am sorry to hear every day what is said of you.

HARPAGON: And I would know from you, what it is that is said of me.

JACQUES: You will be angry.

HARPAGON: No, I should be glad to know what people say of me.

JACQUES: Since you wish it, sir, I will tell you frankly that you are the laughing-stock of everybody; nothing delights people more than to make sport of you and your stinginess.

HARPAGON (Angrily): You are a fool and a scoundrel. (Stalks out right)

VALÈRE (Laughing): Well, Master Jacques, your frankness is badly rewarded, I fear.

JACQUES: It is no business of yours as far as I can see. Laugh at your own cudgelimg when you get it, and don’t come here and laugh at mine. Plague take all sincerity; I give it up for the future, and will cease to tell the truth. I will be revenged. That I promise you. (He and VALÈRE exit right. MARIANNE enters left with FROSINE.)

MARIANNE: Ah! Frosine, how I dread this interview!

FROSINE: I can judge by your looks that the fair young man you spoke of to me is still in your thoughts.

MARIANNE: Yes, a great impression on my heart. I do not know who he is, but he adds to the horrible dread that I have of the husband forced upon me.

FROSINE: All those dandies are pleasant enough, but most are as poor as church mice. It is much better for you to marry an old man with plenty of money. There are little inconveniences to be endured, yes, but his death will soon put you in a position to take a more pleasant husband, who will make amends.

MARIANNE: Oh, Frosine, what a strange state that, in order to be happy, we must look forward to the death of another.

FROSINE: You marry him with the understanding that he will soon leave you a widow. It would be very wrong of him not to die before three months are
over. *Looks off* Here he is himself.

**MARIANNE** *(Horrified as HARPAGON enters, wearing large glasses):* Ah! What a face!

**HARPAGON:** Frosine, she does not appear to show joy at the sight of me.

**FROSINE:** It is because she is still quite awe-struck.

**HARPAGON:** Here is my daughter Élise to welcome you. *(ÉLISE enters left.)*

**MARIANNE:** Dear Élise, I am delighted to make your acquaintance.

**ÉLISE:** And I am so pleased to meet you, Marianne.

**HARPAGON:** Ill weeds grow apace.

**MARIANNE** *(Aside):* What a dreadful creature! I can bear it no longer.

**HARPAGON** *(As CLÉANTE enters left):* And here is my son, who comes to pay his respects to you.

**MARIANNE** *(Aside to FROSINE):* Oh, Frosine! He is the very one of whom I spoke to you.

**HARPAGON:** You are surprised to see my children so old, but I shall soon get rid of them.

**CLÉANTE** *(To MARIANNE):* Madam, my father surprised me when he told me of your pending marriage.

**MARIANNE:** I can say the same thing.

**CLÉANTE:** Madam, my father cannot make a better choice, and it is a great joy to have the honor of welcoming you here. But I cannot say that I should rejoice to have you become my stepmother. If things depended on me, the marriage would never take place.

**MARIANNE:** If you have any repugnance in seeing me your stepmother, I shall have no less in seeing you my stepson. I will never consent to a marriage which is so painful to you.

**HARPAGON:** I beg your pardon, my love, for the impertinence of my son. He is a silly young fellow, who has not yet learned the value of his own words.

**MARIANNE:** I assure you that he has not at all offended me. On the contrary, I am thankful for his confession. If he had spoken differently, I should feel much less esteem for him.

**HARPAGON:** It is kind of you to excuse him. In time, his feelings will change.

**CLÉANTE:** No, Father, they will never change.

**HARPAGON** *(Angrily):* I demand that you alter your manner of speech!

**CLÉANTE:** Very well, since you wish me to speak differently. Allow me, Madam, to take for a moment my father’s place. I can understand no happiness to equal that of pleasing you, and that to be your husband is a glory.

**HARPAGON:** I have a tongue of my own to explain my feelings, and I really don’t care for such an advocate as you.

**CLÉANTE:** Did you ever see, Madam, a more brilliant diamond than the one my father has upon his finger? *(Indicates ring worn by his father)*

**MARIANNE:** It certainly sparkles.

**CLÉANTE** *(Taking the ring off his father’s finger):* You must see it near.

**MARIANNE:** It is beautiful; it possesses
great luster. (She begins to return the ring, but CLÉANTE steps before her.)

CLÉANTE: No, Madam, it is in hands too beautiful; it is a present my father gives you. Is that not true, Father?

HARPAGON: What?

CLÉANTE (To MARIANNE): I beg of you... he would not take it back. I tell you, you will offend him. He is perfectly shocked at your refusal.

HARPAGON (Aside; enraged): Traitor!

CLÉANTE: Really, Father, it is not my fault. I do all I can to persuade her to accept it; but she is obstinate. (To MARIANNE) You will make him ill; for goodness’ sake, hesitate no longer. (He kisses her hand.)

MARIANNE (To HARPAGON): I will keep it now, sir, in order not to make you angry.

VALÈRE (Aside): Too late for that! (Lights out to indicate passage of time. Actors exit. When lights come back up, HARPAGON enters with CLÉANTE.)

HARPAGON: Well, now, all consideration of stepmother aside, tell me what do you think of this lady.

CLÉANTE: To tell you the truth, I did not find her such as I expected. Her manner is that of a thorough coquette, her beauty middling, and her intelligence of the meanest order. Do not suppose that I say this to make you dislike her; for if I must have a stepmother, I like the idea of this one as well as of any other.

HARPAGON: So you don’t care for her?


HARPAGON: I am sorry for it, for that puts an end to a scheme that had occurred to me. I have been thinking that people would find fault with me for marrying so young a girl. I would have given her to you in marriage if it were not for the dislike you have for her.

CLÉANTE (Surprised): To me? (HARPAGON nods. CLÉANTE tries to conceal his delight.) It is true she is not at all to my taste, but, to please you, Father, I will bring myself to marry her.

HARPAGON: I don’t wish to compel you. A marriage cannot be happy where there is no love.

CLÉANTE (Hurriedly): Perhaps it would come. It is said that love is often the fruit of marriage.

HARPAGON: No, if you had felt any inclination for her, you should have married her, but I will return to my first intention and marry her myself.

CLÉANTE: Well, Father, I had better be frank. The truth is that I have loved her ever since I saw her one day on the promenade. I intended to ask you today to let me marry her, and I was only deterred from it because you spoke of marrying her and because I feared to displease you.

HARPAGON: Have you ever paid her any visits?

CLÉANTE: Yes, Father.

HARPAGON: You were well received?

CLÉANTE: Very well, but she did not know who I was; that is why she was so surprised when she saw me today.

HARPAGON (Insidiously): Ha! You have confirmed my suspicions! You will have to get rid of your love for Marianne, to
cease to pay your attentions to a lady I intend for myself. You will marry very
soon the wife I have chosen for you.

CLÉANTE (Gasping): So, you deceive me! Very well. I will declare to you that I
will not give up my love for Marianne.

HARPAGON: You dare to trespass on
my grounds?

CLÉANTE: It is you who trespass on
mine. I was the first.

HARPAGON: You dare to challenge me!
(Cries out) Jacques, bring me my cane.
Quick, I say! (JACQUES enters, carry-
ing cane.)

JACQUES: Gentlemen, what does this
mean? What are you thinking of?
(CLÉANTE moves to the opposite side
of the room with his back to his father.)

HARPAGON (To JACQUES): He dares
to speak to me with such impudence!
You may judge between us to see that I
have right on my side. There is a young
girl I love and want to marry, and the
scoundrel has the impudence to love
her also and wants to marry her in
spite of me.

JACQUES: Oh! He is wrong, sir.

HARPAGON: Is it not abominable to see
a son who does not shrink from becom-
ing the rival of his father? And is it not
his duty to refrain from interfering?

JACQUES: You are quite right, sir.
(Crosses to CLÉANTE)

CLÉANTE (To JACQUES): I am in love
with a young girl who returns my
affection, but my father asks for her
hand in marriage himself. Is it not
shameful for a man of his age to think
of marrying? I ask you if it is right for
him to fall in love? Ought he not leave
that to younger men?

JACQUES: You are quite right; let me
speak a word or two to him. (Crosses to
HARPAGON) Sir, your son is amenable
to reason and conscious of the
respect he owes you. He will submit to
all you wish if you will promise to
treat him more kindly and give him in
marriage a person to his taste.

HARPAGON: Ah! Tell him that he will
obtain everything from me on those
terms, and that, except Marianne, I
leave him free to choose for his wife
whomsoever he pleases.

JACQUES: Leave that to me. (Crosses to
CLÉANTE) Your father is quite ready to
grant you all you want, provided you
give him the deference, respect, and sub-
mission that a son owes to his father.

CLÉANTE: You can assure him that if
he grants me Marianne, he will
always find me the most submissive of
men, and that I shall never do any-
thing contrary to his pleasure.

JACQUES crosses to HARPAGON.)

JACQUES: It’s all right; he consents to
what you say. It’s all settled. (To both)
Gentlemen, you have nothing to do
but to talk quietly over the matter
together; you are agreed now.

CLÉANTE: Jacques, I shall be obliged to
you all my life.

HARPAGON: You have given me great
pleasure, Master Jacques, and
deserve a reward. (HARPAGON feels
in his pocket, JACQUES holds out his
hand, but HARPAGON only pulls out
his handkerchief.) Go. (Waves him off)
I will remember it, I promise you.
(JACQUES exits glumly.)

CLÉANTE: I beg your pardon, Father,
for having been angry. I assure you I
shall remember your kindness forever.

HARPAGON: I am very happy to see you reasonable again. By your submission and respectful conduct you compel me to forget my anger. And I promise you that, in future, you will obtain all you like from me.

CLÉANTE: I ask nothing more; it is sufficient for me that you give me Marianne.

HARPAGON: What? (Scowling) Who talks of giving you Marianne?

CLÉANTE: You, Father.

HARPAGON: I? Is it not you who promised to give her up?

CLÉANTE (Emphatically): Certainly not! On the contrary, I am more determined than ever to have her.

HARPAGON: Deceitful son! I forbid you ever to come within my sight. I disinherit you.

CLÉANTE: As you will. (Lights out, during which HARPAGON and CLÉANTE exit. When lights come back up, La Flèche sneaks on right, holding a small casket. CLÉANTE enters left.)

CLÉANTE: What are you doing, La Flèche?

LA FLÈCHE (Whispering): Come with me directly. We are saved.

CLÉANTE: Saved? How?

LA FLÈCHE (Holding up casket): Here is all you want. It was buried in the garden.

CLÉANTE: What is it?

LA FLÈCHE: Your father’s treasure. (Barking dogs are heard.)

CLÉANTE: How did you manage it?

LA FLÈCHE: I will tell you all about it. Let us be off. Your father’s coming. (They flee left.)

HARPAGON (Running in right): Help! Thieves! Assassins! They have bereaved me of my money! I have lost my consolation and my only joy. Without money it is impossible for me to live. It is all over with me; I can bear it no longer. I am dead; I am buried. I must go. I will demand justice. I will hang everybody. (Lights out. When lights come back up, HARPAGON is standing center with OFFICER.)

OFFICER: You say how much was in that casket?

HARPAGON: Ten thousand crowns.

OFFICER: Ten thousand crowns! (Whistles) A considerable theft.

HARPAGON: There is no punishment great enough for the enormity of the crime.

OFFICER: Whom do you suspect of this robbery?

HARPAGON: Everyone. I wish you to take into custody the whole town and suburbs.

OFFICER: You must not accuse everybody. We must collect evidence in order to proceed with more rigor for the recovery of the stolen money. (JACQUES enters right.)

JACQUES: Is this gentleman coming to supper with you?

HARPAGON (Irritated): We have more important matters to discuss than
supper. I want you to tell me what has become of the money stolen from me.

JACQUES (Surprised): Some money has been stolen from you?

HARPAGON: Yes! And I'll have you hanged if you don't give it back.

OFFICER: If you can provide evidence, no harm shall come to you, and you shall be well rewarded by your master. Surely you know something about this theft.

JACQUES (Pondering for a moment, then smiling maliciously): Sir, since you want me to tell you what I know, I believe it is your steward Valère who has done this.

HARPAGON (Surprised): Valère? He seemed so faithful to me! What makes you believe it?

JACQUES: Ah—well, I believe it—because I believe it.

OFFICER: But you must tell us the proof you have.

HARPAGON: Did you see him hanging about the place where I had put my money?

JACQUES: Yes, indeed! Ah...where was your money?

HARPAGON: In the garden.

JACQUES: Exactly; I saw him loitering about in the garden. With a...with a...A casket?

HARPAGON: A casket?

JACQUES: Yes. Exactly! A casket.

OFFICER: Describe this casket.

JACQUES: It was—it was a large casket.

HARPAGON (Disappointed): The one taken from me is a small one.

JACQUES: Yes, I mean—small.

OFFICER: What color was it?

JACQUES: What color? Er—ah...can't you help me find the word? Red, isn't it?

HARPAGON: No, gray.

JACQUES: Ha! Yes, reddish-gray! That's what I meant.

HARPAGON: There is no doubt about it. It's my casket for certain.

JACQUES (As VALÈRE enters right): Sir, since everything is known to you, I will not deny what I have done.

HARPAGON: And what fine motives can you possibly give me, infamous thief?

VALÈRE: Of what crime do you speak?

HARPAGON: It is in vain for you to try to hide it. I have just heard all the particulars.

VALÈRE: Sir, since everything is known to you, I will not deny what I have done.

JACQUES (Surprised): Oh! Oh! Have I guessed the truth?

VALÈRE: I intended to speak to you about it and was watching for a favorable opportunity; I beg of you not to be angry and to hear my motives.

HARPAGON: And what fine motives can you possibly give me, infamous thief?

VALÈRE: I do not deserve this title. I am guilty, it is true, but, when you have heard all I have to say, you will
see that the harm is not so great.

HARPAGON: You scoundrel! Whatever made you commit such a deed?

VALÈRE: A god, sir, who carries with him his excuses for all he makes people do: Love.

HARPAGON: The love of my gold!

VALÈRE: No, sir, it is not your wealth that has tempted me. Just leave me what I have.

HARPAGON: But did anyone ever meet with such villainy! He wishes to keep what he has robbed me of!

VALÈRE: Do you call that a robbery? I readily acknowledge that she is a treasure, and the most precious one you have. We have pledged our faith to each other and have taken an oath never to forsake one another. Nothing but death can separate us.

HARPAGON: You must be devilishly bewitched by my money.

VALÈRE: It was not your money that prompted my heart; a nobler motive inspired me. You may do as you please with me, but I beg of you to believe, I am the only one guilty and that your daughter has done nothing wrong in all this.

HARPAGON: I should think not! It would be strange, indeed, if my daughter had a share in this crime. But I will have that treasure back again, and you must confess to what place you have carried it off.

VALÈRE (Puzzled): I have not carried it off. It is still in your house.

HARPAGON: My treasure has not left my house? Well, then, tell me, have you taken any liberties with...

VALÈRE: Ah! Sir, you wrong us both; the flame with which I burn is too pure. I had rather die than show the least offensive thought for your daughter.

HARPAGON: What rubbish are you talking about my daughter?

VALÈRE: It was only yesterday that she signed our mutual promise of marriage.

HARPAGON: My daughter has signed a promise of marriage? Oh, heavens! Another misfortune! Aggravation of misery! Excess of despair! (To OFFICER) Sir, discharge your duty, and draw me up an indictment against him as a thief and a criminal.

JACQUES (Happily): Ah! Just as I thought—a thief and a criminal!

VALÈRE: These are names I do not deserve, and when you know who I am... (ÉLISE enters left.)

ÉLISE: What is going on here?

HARPAGON: Ah! Guilty daughter! You give your love to an infamous thief and engage yourself to him without my consent! (To VALÈRE) Good gallows, impudent thief, shall do me justice for your audacity.

VALÈRE: I shall at least have a hearing before I am condemned.

ÉLISE (Kneeling before HARPAGON): Father, give yourself time to consider what you do. He is not what you imagine, and you will think it less strange that I should have given myself to him, when you know that without him you would long ago have lost me forever. It is he who saved me from the drowning that day and to whom you owe my life.

HARPAGON: It would have been much better for me if he had suffered you to be drowned rather than do what he
has done. I will hear nothing more. Justice must have its course. (ANSELME enters left, with FROSINE and MARIANNE.)

ANSELME: What is happening, Mr. Harpagon? We could hear you from the street.

HARPAISON: Ah, Mr. Anselme, you can never imagine what vexation and disorder is connected with the contract you have come to sign! You see there a scoundrel who has introduced himself into my house as a servant in order to steal my money and seduce my daughter. They have given each other a promise of marriage. This insult concerns you, Mr. Anselme, for it is you that I intended as my daughter’s husband.

ANSELME: It is not my intention to force anybody to marry me, and to lay claim to a heart that has already bestowed itself.

HARPAISON: Officer, charge him, (Indicates VALÈRE) as he ought to be.

VALÈRE: What crime can be made of my love for your daughter? I must tell you who I am.

HARPAISON: I don’t care who you are. The world is full of pretenders to nobility.

VALÈRE: I am too upright to adorn myself with a name which is not mine. All Naples can bear testimony to my birth!

ANSELME: Careful! You speak before a man to whom all Naples is known. (Indicates himself)

VALÈRE: Then you must know Don Thomas d’Alburci.

ANSELME (Surprised): No one knows him better than I do.

VALÈRE: It is to him that I owe my birth.

ANSELME: What! You dare to call yourself the son of Don Thomas d’Alburci? It has been at least sixteen years since he and his noble family died in a shipwreck at sea when he was trying to seek asylum from the cruel persecutions at Naples.

VALÈRE: I was that son, then seven years of age, who was saved from the wreck by a Spanish vessel. The captain of that ship brought me up as his own son. Lately I have heard that my father is not dead, as I thought he was. My search for him led me to Élise. My love for her made me come into her house disguised as a servant to avoid the wrath of her greedy father.

ANSELME: But what proof have you of your true identity besides your words?

VALÈRE: What proof? The captain of the Spanish vessel, a ruby seal that belonged to my father, an agate bracelet which my mother put upon my arm, and old Pedro, a servant who was saved with me from the wreck.

MARIANNE: Can this be? All you say clearly tells me that you are my brother.

VALÈRE: You are my sister?

MARIANNE: Pirates captured my mother and me after the wreck of our vessel. After ten years of slavery, we returned to Naples, where we found all our property sold. When we could hear no news of our father, we came to Paris, where we have endured a weary life.

ANSELME: O heaven! This is a miracle. I am rendered almost speechless! Come to my arms, my children, and share the joy of your happy father!
VALÈRE and MARIANNE: Father?

ANSELME: Yes, I am Don Thomas d’Alburci, whom heaven saved from the waves with all the money he had with him. I believed my family dead and settled here under the name of Anselme, wishing to forget the sorrows of a name associated with so many and great troubles.

HARPAGON (To ANSELME): Valère is your son?

ANSELME: Yes.

HARPAGON: That being so, I make you responsible for the ten thousand crowns that he has stolen from me.

ANSELME (Stunned): He stole from you!

VALÈRE: Who said so?

HARPAGON: Master Jacques.

VALÈRE (To JACQUES): You said that? (JACQUES looks away guiltily.)

OFFICER: He certainly did. I am the officer who received his deposition.

VALÈRE: Can you really believe me capable of such a base action?

HARPAGON: Capable or not, I must find my money. (CLÉANTE enters right.)

CLÉANTE: Do not grieve for your money, Father. It is in a safe place. If you consent to let me marry Marianne, your money will be given back to you.

HARPAGON: Has nothing been taken out?

CLÉANTE: Nothing at all. Is it your intention to join your consent to that of Marianne’s mother, who leaves her at liberty to do as she likes?

MARIANNE (To CLÉANTE): This consent is no longer necessary. Heaven has given me back a brother and a father. (Gestures to VALÈRE and ANSELME)

CLÉANTE: A brother! A father!

ANSELME: Mr. Harpagon, consent, as I do, to this double marriage.

HARPAGON: Do you take upon yourself to defray the expenses of these two weddings?

ANSELME: Agreed! Let us go enjoy the blessings this happy day brings us.

OFFICER: Stop, sirs, stop! Who is to pay me for my duties? I have not executed them for nothing.

HARPAGON (Pointing to JACQUES): There is a fellow you can hang in payment!

JACQUES: Alas! I receive a good cudgeling for telling the truth, and they hang me for lying.

ANSELME: Mr. Harpagon, you must forgive him this piece of imposture.

HARPAGON: You will pay the officer, then?

ANSELME: Let it be so. Let us go quickly, my children, to share our joy with your mother!

HARPAGON: And I to see my dear casket! (He rubs his hands together greedily as curtain closes.)

THE END

(Production Notes on page 44)