

# The Miser

A One-act Adaptation of  
Molière's L'Avare

*by John DePrine*

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### **STORY OF THE PLAY**

Monsieur Harpagon is a miser, through and through. Although he has his beloved treasure buried in the garden to protect it from thieves, he abhors waste such as warmth and food! He tells his children, Elise and Cleante, they may only marry with his consent, and he looks for spouses for both of them with the help of Madame Frosine, a matchmaker. She quickly finds a future spouse for everyone, including Monsieur Harpagon. Little does he know Cleante has fallen for Marianne, who Harpagon himself plans to marry, and Elise has fallen for the penniless Valere. The tables are quickly turned when Valere and Cleante hide his beloved treasure and true identities are revealed. This condensed adaptation of Molière's *L'Avare* runs about 1 hour.

### **ORIGINAL PRODUCTION**

November 2012 by the Broadmead Players of Cockeysville, Maryland with the following cast and crew:

Robert Gist as the Miser, Sita Smith as Elise, Jonas Rappaport as Valere, Robert Davies as Cleante, Judith Hundersmark as Madame Frosine, Alma Smith as Marianne, and Branch Warfiled as Seigneur Anselme. The producers were Charles and Anne Lee.

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(4 m, 3 w)*

In order of appearance:

**MONSIEUR HARPAGON:** An elderly miser.

**ELISE:** Harpagon's beautiful daughter.

**VALERE:** Harpagon's handsome manservant.

**CLEANTE:** Harpagon's handsome son.

**MADAME FROSINE:** An elegant matchmaker.

**MARIANNE:** Town girl, enamored by Cleante.

**SEIGNEUR ANSELME:** An aged, wealthy suitor.

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## **SETTING**

THE SCENE: The drawing room of Harpagon's once elegant house in Paris.

THE TIME: Winter, 1850.

THE SET: There are four entrances to the room. In the rear wall are two French doors that look out onto a neglected garden covered in snow. It must be possible for the characters to enter the room through these French doors. They are separated by a fireplace where a very small fire burns. In the middle of the left and right walls are doors that lead to other parts of the house. The door to the right leads to the unseen dining room and kitchen; the one to the left to the unseen front of the house and the street. The room is sparsely and shabbily furnished. There are one or two extra logs beside the fireplace. It is snowing outside.

**Scene 1**

*(AT RISE: MONSIEUR HARPAGON, dressed in patched dressing gown, stands before the fireplace.)*

**HARPAGON:** *(Grumbles to himself.)* Waste! Waste! Waste!

*(ELISE enters from left, wearing two shawls, worn clothes.)*

**ELISE:** What's wrong, Father?

**HARPAGON:** *(Turns to her, gestures to fireplace.)* Who dared light a fire in this room?

**ELISE:** *(Sarcastically.)* Not I. How well I know fuel costs money.

**HARPAGON:** *(Smiles.)* Exactly! Why burn money?

**ELISE:** *(Crosses to French door and looks off.)* It is snowing outside.

**HARPAGON:** It isn't snowing in here!

**ELISE:** *(Under her breath as she turns to him.)* It might as well be!

**HARPAGON:** *(Snarls.)* What did you say?

**ELISE:** I said, "I...I...I can tell! See, I'm wearing two shawls."  
*(Models shawls.)*

**HARPAGON:** *(Walks around her.)* Two? There you are! Another example of extravagance. Are they new?

**ELISE:** *(Inspects shawls.)* New? Certainly not! In this house that's a four-letter word.

**HARPAGON:** *(Crosses to center.)* A four-letter word! Oh! I'm surrounded by wastrels who squander my gold and idiots who can't spell. My children have inherited their mother's cultivated ignorance. Well, of one thing you can be certain: I shall be very careful whom they marry.

**ELISE:** *(Watches him.)* You'd have your children marry intelligent partners?

**HARPAGON:** *(Shakes finger at her.)* Yes. And rich ones! If either you or your brother, Cleante, try to marry without my consent, I'll turn you out with only the clothes on your backs. Then, only if I'm in a generous frame of mind.  
*(Looks about.)* Where is your lazy brother?

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**ELISE:** (*Shrugs shoulders.*) I don't know.

**HARPAGON:** He's probably still in bed. Well, if he is, at least he isn't out squandering my gold...

**ELISE:** (*Aside.*) To do that he'd have to be an alchemist!

**HARPAGON:** And where is Valere?

**ELISE:** (*Gestures to garden.*) You sent him on an errand.

**HARPAGON:** I know I sent him on an errand. Is he back?

**ELISE:** I haven't seen him.

**HARPAGON:** (*Wistfully.*) If only my children were more like him. No man could ask for a better, more loyal servant than Valere!

**ELISE:** (*Adoringly.*) He is wonderful!

(*SFX: Breaking dishes offstage.*)

**HARPAGON:** What was that?

**ELISE:** (*Adoringly.*) I said, "He is wonderful."

**HARPAGON:** (*With excitement.*) No! No! What was that noise?

**ELISE:** It came from the kitchen.

**HARPAGON:** (*Crosses to right.*) Yes, it did! That stupid, clumsy cook has broken another dish. Waste! Waste! Waste! (*Angry.*) Dishes cost money, my money. (*Exits right.*)

**ELISE:** (*Turns to fireplace.*) Poor cook! (*Shivers and picks up a log.*) Why not?

(*Sprinkled with snow, VALERE appears at a French door.*)

**VALERE:** (*Taps on French door.*) Elise! Elise! Let me in!

**ELISE:** (*Startled, drops the log.*) Oh! Valere! (*Hurries to open French door for him.*) You're back!

**VALERE:** And nearly frozen. (*With realization.*) Actually it seems warmer out there!

**ELISE:** (*Brushes snow from his shoulders.*) Where have you been? Evicting more tenants?

**VALERE:** I did that yesterday! Today he sent me to deliver and receive a message.

**ELISE:** (*With surprise.*) A message?

**VALERE:** Which I have done. Since there will be no thanks from him, perhaps you will show me some appreciation with a kiss.

**ELISE:** (*Anxiously, draws back.*) No, Valere. Father may see us.

**VALERE:** (*Takes her hands.*) Elise, someday your father will have to know how we feel about each other.

**ELISE:** (*Sadly withdraws hands.*) Much good that will do.

**VALERE:** You think Monsieur Harpagon will not want a servant for a penniless son-in-law?

**ELISE:** (*With resignation.*) I know he will not want a penniless son-in-law.

**VALERE:** (*Lightly.*) Alas! I'm just a poor orphan. I have no prospect of improving my station or inheriting some rich relative's fortune.

**ELISE:** (*Moves away from him.*) Isn't it frustrating?

**VALERE:** (*With a gesture of hopelessness.*) To have no rich relatives?

**ELISE:** To have one who is rich...and stingy! What are we to do?

**VALERE:** We must do the impossible.

**ELISE:** (*Crosses to settee and sits.*) Will that be possible?

**VALERE:** (*Crosses to stand behind her.*) Your father must be convinced I am worthy of his beautiful daughter.

**ELISE:** (*Looks over shoulder.*) Penniless? How do you mean to work that miracle?

**VALERE:** (*Crosses to stand in front of her.*) Perhaps you've noticed how I endeavor to ingratiate myself to him whenever it's possible...and even when it's not!

**ELISE:** Yes, I have noticed.

**VALERE:** Perhaps my subservient behavior has embarrassed you?

**ELISE:** Yes, but Father loves subservience.

**VALERE:** (*Moves downstage.*) Perhaps you've noticed how I flatter him beyond the boundaries of good taste?

**ELISE:** Yes, I have. But, Father is very susceptible to flattery and immune to good taste.

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