

# ЖАН-БАТИСТ МОЛЬЕР

THE MISER

# Жан-Батист Мольер

## The Miser

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*The Miser:*

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# **Molière**

## **The Miser**

## **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***

# 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.

Har. I leave it to your conscience, remember!

## SCENE IV. – HARPAGON (*alone.*)

This rascally valet is a constant vexation to me; and I hate the very sight of the good-for-nothing cripple. Really, it is no small anxiety to keep by one a large sum of money; and 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. I am not a little puzzled to find in the whole of this house a safe hiding-place. Don't speak to me of your strong boxes, I will never trust to them. Why, they are just the very things thieves set upon!

**SCENE V. – HARPAGON, ÉLISE**  
*and CLÉANTE are seen talking*  
*together at the back of the stage*

Har. (*thinking himself alone.*) Meanwhile, I hardly know whether I did right to bury in my garden the ten thousand crowns which were paid to me yesterday. Ten thousand crowns in gold is a sum sufficiently ... (*Aside, on perceiving Élise and Cléante whispering together*) Good heavens! I have betrayed myself; my warmth has carried me away. I believe I spoke aloud while reasoning with myself. (*To Cléante and Élise*) What do you want?

Cle. Nothing, father.

Har. Have you been here long?

Eli. We have only just come.

Har. Did you hear...?

Cle. What, father?

Har. There...!

Cle. What?

Har. What I was just now saying.

Cle. No.

Har. You did. I know you did.

Eli. I beg your pardon, father, but we did not.

Har. I see well enough that you overheard a few words. The

fact is, I was only talking to myself about the trouble one has nowadays to raise any money; and I was saying that he is a fortunate man who has ten thousand crowns in his house.

Cle. We were afraid of coming near you, for fear of intruding.

Har. I am very glad to tell you this, so that you may not misinterpret things, and imagine that I said that it was I who have ten thousand crowns.

Cle. We do not wish to interfere in your affairs.

Har. Would that I had them, these ten thousand crowns!

Cle. I should not think that ...

Har. What a capital affair it would be for me.

Cle. There are things ...

Har. I greatly need them.

Cle. I fancy that ...

Har. It would suit me exceedingly well.

Eli. You are ...

Har. And I should not have to complain, as I do now, that the times are bad.

Cle. Hear me, father, you have no reason to complain; and everyone knows that you are well enough off.

Har. How? I am well enough off! Those who say it are liars. Nothing can be more false; and they are scoundrels who spread such reports.

Eli. Don't be angry.

Har. It is strange that my own children betray me and become my enemies.

Cle. Is it being your enemy to say that you have wealth?

Har. Yes, it is. Such talk and your extravagant expenses will be the cause that some day thieves will come and cut my throat, in the belief that I am made of gold.

Cle. What extravagant expenses do I indulge in?

Har. What! Is there anything more scandalous than this sumptuous attire with which you jaunt it about the town? I was remonstrating with your sister yesterday, but you are still worse. It cries vengeance to heaven; and were we to calculate all you are wearing, from head to foot, we should find enough for a good annuity. I have told you a hundred times, my son, that your manners displease me exceedingly; you affect the marquis terribly, and for you to be always dressed as you are, you must certainly rob me.

Cle. Rob you? And how?

Har. How should I know? Where else could you find money enough to clothe yourself as you do?

Cle. I, father? I play; and as I am very lucky, I spend in clothes all the money I win.

Har. It is very wrong. If you are lucky at play, you should profit by it, and place the money you win at decent interest, so that you may find it again some day. I should like to know, for instance, without mentioning the rest, what need there is for all these ribbons with which you are decked from head to foot, and if half a dozen tags are not sufficient to fasten your breeches. What necessity is there for anyone to spend money upon wigs, when

we have hair of our own growth, which costs nothing. I will lay a wager that, in wigs and ribbons alone, there are certainly twenty pistoles spent, and twenty pistoles brings in at least eighteen livres six sous eight deniers per annum, at only eight per cent interest.

Cle. You are quite right.

Har. Enough on this subject; let us talk of something else. (*Aside, noticing Cléante and Élise, who make signs to one another*) I believe they are making signs to one another to pick my pocket. (*Aloud*) What do you mean by those signs?

Eli. We are hesitating as to who shall speak first, for we both have something to tell you.

Har. And I also have something to tell you both.

Cle. We wanted to speak to you about marriage, father.

Har. The very thing I wish to speak to you about.

Eli. Ah! my father!

Har. What is the meaning of that exclamation? Is it the word, daughter, or the thing itself that frightens you?

Cle. Marriage may frighten us both according to the way you take it; and our feelings may perhaps not coincide with your choice.

Har. A little patience, if you please. You need not be alarmed. I know what is good for you both, and you will have no reason to complain of anything I intend to do. To begin at the beginning. (*To Cléante*) Do you know, tell me, a young person, called Marianne, who lives not far from here?

Cle. Yes, father.

Har. And you?

Eli. I have heard her spoken of.

Har. Well, my son, and how do you like the girl?

Cle. She is very charming.

Har. Her face?

Cle. Modest and intelligent.

Har. Her air and manner?

Cle. Perfect, undoubtedly.

Har. Do you not think that such a girl well deserves to be thought of?

Cle. Yes, father.

Har. She would form a very desirable match?

Cle. Very desirable.

Har. That there is every likelihood of her making a thrifty and careful wife.

Cle. Certainly.

Har. And that a husband might live very happily with her?

Cle. I have not the least doubt about it.

Har. There is one little difficulty; I am afraid she has not the fortune we might reasonably expect.

Cle. Oh, my father, riches are of little importance when one is sure of marrying a virtuous woman.

Har. I beg your pardon. Only there is this to be said: that if we do not find as much money as we could wish, we may make it up in something else.

Cle. That follows as a matter of course.

Har. Well, I must say that I am very much pleased to find that you entirely agree with me, for her modest manner and her gentleness have won my heart; and I have made up my mind to marry her, provided I find she has some dowry.

Cle. Eh!

Har. What now?

Cle. You are resolved, you say...?

Har. To marry Marianne.

Cle. Who? you? you?

Har. Yes, I, I, I. What does all this mean?

Cle. I feel a sudden dizziness, and I must withdraw for a little while.

Har. It will be nothing. Go quickly into the kitchen and drink a large glass of cold water, it will soon set you all right again.



## SCENE VI. – HARPAGON, ÉLISE

Har. There goes one of your effeminate fops, with no more stamina than a chicken. That is what I have resolved for myself, my daughter. As to your brother, I have thought for him of a certain widow, of whom I heard this morning; and you I shall give to Mr. Anselme.

Eli. To Mr. Anselme?

Har. Yes, a staid and prudent man, who is not above fifty, and of whose riches everybody speaks.

Eli. (*curtseying*). I have no wish to marry, father, if you please.

Har. (*imitating Élise*). And I, my little girl, my darling, I wish you to marry, if you please.

Eli. (*curtseying again*). I beg your pardon, my father.

Har. (*again imitating Élise*). I beg your pardon, my daughter.

Eli. I am the very humble servant of Mr. Anselme, but (*curtseying again*), with your leave, I shall not marry him.

Har. I am your very humble servant, but (*again imitating Élise*) you will marry him this very evening.

Eli. This evening?

Har. This evening.

Eli. (*curtseying again*). It cannot be done, father.

Har. (*imitating Élise*). It will be done, daughter.

Eli. No.

Har. Yes.

Eli. No, I tell you.

Har. Yes, I tell you.

Eli. You will never force me to do such a thing

Har. I will force you to it.

Eli. I had rather kill myself than marry such a man.

Har. You will not kill yourself, and you will marry him. But did you ever see such impudence? Did ever any one hear a daughter speak in such a fashion to her father?

Eli. But did ever anyone see a father marry his daughter after such a fashion?

Har. It is a match against which nothing can be said, and I am perfectly sure that everybody will approve of my choice.

Eli. And I know that it will be approved of by no reasonable person.

Har. (*seeing Valère*). There is Valère coming. Shall we make him judge in this affair?

Eli. Willingly.

Har. You will abide by what he says?

Eli. Yes, whatever he thinks right, I will do.

Har. Agreed.

## SCENE VII. – VALÈRE, HARPAGON, ÉLISE

Har. Valère, we have chosen you to decide who is in the right, my daughter or I.

Val. It is certainly you, Sir.

Har. But have you any idea of what we are talking about?

Val. No; but you could not be in the wrong; you are reason itself.

Har. I want to give her to-night, for a husband, a man as rich as he is good; and the hussy tells me to my face that she scorns to take him. What do you say to that?

Val. What I say to it?

Har. Yes?

Val. Eh! eh!

Har. What?

Val. 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. How so? Mr. Anselme is an excellent match; he is a nobleman, and a gentleman too; of simple habits, and extremely well off. He has no children left from his first marriage. Could she meet with anything more suitable?

Val. It is true. But she might say that you are going rather fast, and that she ought to have at least a little time to consider whether

her inclination could reconcile itself to ...

Har. It is an opportunity I must not allow to slip through my fingers. I find an advantage here which I should not find elsewhere, and he agrees to take her without dowry.

Val. Without dowry?

Har. Yes.

Val. Ah! I have nothing more to say. A more convincing reason could not be found; and she must yield to that.

Har. It is a considerable saving to me.

Val. Undoubtedly; this admits of no contradiction. It is true that your daughter might represent to you that marriage is a more serious affair than people are apt to believe; that the happiness or misery of a whole life depends on it, and that an engagement which is to last till death ought not to be entered into without great consideration.

Har. Without dowry!

Val. That must of course decide everything. There are certainly people who might tell you that on such occasions the wishes of a daughter are no doubt to be considered, and that this great disparity of age, of disposition, and of feelings might be the cause of many an unpleasant thing in a married life.

Har. Without dowry!

Val. Ah! it must be granted that there is no reply to that; who in the world could think otherwise? I do not mean to say but that there are many fathers who would set a much higher value on the happiness of their daughter than on the money they may have to

give for their marriage; who would not like to sacrifice them to their own interests, and who would, above all things, try to see in a marriage that sweet conformity of tastes which is a sure pledge of honour, tranquillity and joy; and that ...

Har. Without dowry!

Val. That is true; nothing more can be said. Without dowry. How can anyone resist such arguments?

Har. (*aside, looking towards the garden*). Ah! I fancy I hear a dog barking. Is anyone after my money. (*To Valère*) Stop here, I'll come back directly.

## SCENE VIII. – ÉLISE, VALÈRE

Eli. Surely, Valère, you are not in earnest when you speak to him in that manner?

Val. I do it that I may not vex him, and the better to secure my ends. To resist him boldly would simply spoil everything. There are certain people who are only to be managed by indirect means, temperaments averse from all resistance, restive natures whom truth causes to rear, who always kick when we would lead them on the right road of reason, and who can only be led by a way opposed to that by which you wish them to go. Pretend to comply with his wishes; you are much more likely to succeed in the end, and ...

Eli. But this marriage, Valère?

Val. We will find some pretext for breaking it off.

Eli. But what pretext can we find if it is to be concluded to-night?

Val. You must ask to have it delayed, and must feign some illness or other.

Eli. But he will soon discover the truth if they call in the doctor.

Val. Not a bit of it. Do you imagine that a doctor understands what he is about? Nonsense! Don't be afraid. Believe me, you may complain of any disease you please, the doctor will be at no loss to explain to you from what it proceeds.

## SCENE IX – HARPAGON, ÉLISE, VALÈRE

Har. (*alone, at the farther end of the stage*). It is nothing, thank heaven!

Val. (*not seeing Harpagon*). In short, flight is the last resource we have left us to avoid all this; and if your love, dear Élise, is as strong as ... (*Seeing Harpagon*) Yes, a daughter is bound to obey her father. She has no right to inquire what a husband offered to her is like, and when the most important question, "without dowry," presents itself, she should accept anybody that is given her.

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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