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Family Plays

THE MISER

A FREEWHEELING ADAPTATION
FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES BY
ROLAND L. REED

FROM THE STORY BY
MOLIÈRE



THE MISER

Comedy. Adapted by Roland Reed. From the story by Molière. Cast: 6m., 3w., with doubling, or up to 15 (11m., 4w.) This adaptation is a version for young people of the well-known French satire. Harpagon employs a matchmaker to find him a rich wife. He then sets out to marry his daughter off to a rich old man, and his son to a plump, well-endowed widow. But the young people have ideas of their own and engage Harpagon's resourceful Steward on their side. At Harpagon's expense, they prepare a lavish banquet in honor of his engagement, and in his presence shower rich gifts on his fiancée. At the height of this, Harpagon's money is reported stolen. Giving up all pretense of civility, he bemoans his misery and relinquishes his fiancée, if he can only be reunited with his beloved money. When the money is restored to him, he returns to his penny-pinching ways. *One set. French costumes of the 17th century. Approximate running time: 60 minutes. Code: MJ9.*

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THE MISER

Adapted by Ronald L. Reed

CAST

HARPAGON, a miser, hoping to marry Marianne for her dowry

CLÉANTE, Harpagon's son, in love with Marianne

ÉLISE, Harpagon's daughter, in love with Valere

VALÈRE, Harpagon's steward, in love with Elise

MARIANNE, in love with Cléante

ANSELME, father of Valère and Marianne

FROSINE, a matchmaker

LA FLÈCHE, Harpagon's valet

SIMON, a broker

JACQUES, Harpagon's cook and coachman

DAME CLAUDE, Harpagon's housekeeper

BRINDAVOINE, Harpagon's lackey

LA MERLUCHE, Harpagon's lackey

THE MAGISTRATE, and his Clerk

The entire play takes place at Harpagon's home, in Paris.

Note: The above cast list shows the proper French pronunciation of cast names. This is applicable to any use of the names throughout the play, even though the accent marks are omitted in the body of the text.

This adaptation of **THE MISER** was first performed on 14 May, 1965, by the Lincoln Community Playhouse, of Lincoln, Nebraska, under the direction of Roland L. Reed.

THE MISER

ACT ONE

LA FLECHE. Ow, Ow, Ow!

HARPAGON. Thief, help, police.

(Chases LA FLECHE. Beats him).

(Both stop).

LA FLECHE *(Aside)*, He's so mean!

HARPAGON. What did he say?

LA FLECHE. I said "ow."

HARPAGON. "Ow"?

LA FLECHE. "Ow."

HARPAGON. Oh . . . No, what else did you say?

LA FLECHE. I said I hope you didn't crack your cane on my head.
They cost two ecus.

HARPAGON *(Sobs and grabs giant magnifying glass)*. Two ecus? Oh,
no!

(Looks it over carefully as LA FLECHE tries to sneak off.

HARPAGON *sighs*). Come back thief! Murderer! Police! Call
out the army!

LA FLECHE *(Coming back in disgust)*. Oh, sir, stop yelling, you'll
make yourself hoarse. You'll have to pay a doctor, buy throat
medicine . . .

HARPAGON. Ooh, stop!

(Holding his ears). Don't say those horrible words.

LA FLECHE. What horrible words? Doctor? Medicine?

HARPAGON. No! "Pay"! "Buy"! . . . Ooh, now you have made me
say them. I could bite my tongue except that I would then have
to buy . . . er . . . borrow some sore tongue medicine.

LA FLECHE *(Aside)*. Isn't he a stingy old man?

HARPAGON. Be off now . . . wait, why was I beating you?

LA FLECHE. You *(haha)*, thought that I *(haha)* your faithful ser-
vant and friend *(haha)* had stolen your *(haha)* money.

HARPAGON. No! Oh, no, *(haha)* you don't mean it *(haha)*. You say
that I *(haha)*

(*LA FLECHE is laughing and nodding like a fool*). thought you had (*haha*) stolen (*haha*) (*freeze*) my money!

(*Grabs him by the throat*). Where is it, you kidnapper?

(*Breaks down and sobs*). You have taken away my itty-bitty baby money—all my silver and gold little darlings.

LA FLECHE. Oh, stop it. I haven't taken your silly money.

HARPAGON (*Horrified—freezes. Points at La FLECHE, disbelieves his own ears*). You called my money, silly money?

LA FLECHE. I'm sorry. I take it back.

HARPAGON. What! Where did you take it?

LA FLECHE. I didn't mean that, I . . .

HARPAGON (*In a full-blown tantrum*). Where did you take my money!!

LA FLECHE. I didn't take your money.

HARPAGON. You didn't take my nice money?

LA FLECHE. No, I didn't take it.

HARPAGON. Are you sure?

LA FLECHE. Yes, I'm sure.

HARPAGON. Cross your heart?

(*LA FLECHE looks at audience and crosses his stomach*).

(*HARPAGON nods as if believing him, then . . .*) Alright, where did you hide it!

LA FLECHE. I didn't steal your money so I couldn't hide it.

HARPAGON. Let me see your hands.

LA FLECHE (*Shows his hands*). There.

(*HARPAGON inspects them carefully*). Satisfied?

HARPAGON. Let's see the others.

LA FLECHE. The others?

HARPAGON. Yes, yes the others.

(*LA FLECHE shrugs shoulders, looks at audience, puts hands behind his back and brings them out again. HARPAGON repeats inspection*).

LA FLECHE. (*Aside*). The devil take stingy old men and their money grubbing.

HARPAGON. What!

LA FLECHE. What! What?

HARPAGON. What—what did you . . . what did you say about stingy old men and their money grubbing?

LA FLECHE. I suggest that the devil take them.

HARPAGON. Who are you talking about?

LA FLECHE. Stingy old man. Skinflints. Money grubbers.

HARPAGON. But who are these people?

LA FLECHE. Penny pinchers.

HARPAGON. Tell me who you meant?

LA FLECHE. I name no names.

HARPAGON. You'd better tell me!

LA FLECHE. Do you think I meant you?

HARPAGON. Never mind. You'd better say no more.

LA FLECHE. Would you make me stop saying bad things about misers?

HARPAGON. You'd better. . . .

LA FLECHE. They say there's one in our neighborhood.

HARPAGON. Not another word!

(Starts to walk away).

LA FLECHE *(Has not moved. After short pause)*. If the shoe fits, wear it.

HARPAGON. Out, murderer, out thief, out, out, out!

(Chases LA FLECHE around stage and off. They come immediately back on stage with LA FLECHE chasing and beating HARPAGON with his own stick. Both stop. Notice they are reversed. LA FLECHE, embarrassed, quickly recovers, gives stick to HARPAGON, who thanks him. They turn about and renew the chase off stage. Throughout all their chases, HARPAGON shouts thief, scoundrel, etc. and LA FLECHE yells ow! ow! changing pitch with each pair (HARPAGON Comes back on—speaks to audience).

Nothing is safe with dangerous rascals like that around. If you have any money with you, and you had better hide it. I hid 10,000 gold ecus in my cash box and buried the cash box in my garden. I have to guard it all the time from sneaky weasels like him.

(ELISE and CLEANTE enter).

How I love to go out to the garden, and when no one is looking, I can play with my money and kiss the ground where my beau-

tiful 10,000 gold ecus are buried. Oh, mercy me, what did I say? (*To audience*). Was I talking out loud? Is that my son and daughter listening? Did I say 10,000 ecus buried in my garden? Did they hear me? They are eavesdropping to find out where my money is.

(*To CLEANTE and ELISE*) What are you doing there?

CLEANTE. Nothing at all.

HARPAGON. Did you hear . . . ?

CLEANTE. What, papa?

HARPAGON. That . . . ?

ELISE. What?

HARPAGON. Did you hear what I just said?

ELISE. No, father.

HARPAGON. Didn't you hear just a little bit of it?

CLEANTE. No, father, nothing.

HARPAGON. Perhaps just a word or two?

ELISE. Not a syllable.

CLEANTE. Not a sound.

HARPAGON (*Aside*). I knew it, they heard everything.

(*To CLEANTE*) Well, I've nothing to hide. I merely remarked that it would certainly be nice if I had 10,000 ecus buried in the garden . . . er, in the house, or anywhere. Uh, it would be nice, especially for a man like myself, who doesn't have 10,000 ecus buried in . . . the . . . garden . . . or . . . anywhere else?

(*CLEANTE and ELISE have been peering intently at him. Toward the end of the line, HARPAGON begins to feel that he may be giving it all away and that thought makes him a bit ill*).

CLEANTE. I hope we haven't upset you.

HARPAGON. I only tell you what I was saying so you won't be confused and think I said I have 10,000 ecus buried in the garden.

ELISE. We weren't worried about your money.

HARPAGON. I wish I had 10,000 ecus . . .

CLEANTE. But, Father . . .

HARPAGON. Buried in my garden.

ELISE. Why are you . . .

HARPAGON. Or in the house, or anywhere . . .

CLEANTE. You must calm yourself . . .

HARPAGON. . . . Elise.

ELISE. Father?

HARPAGON. I could certainly use it.

ELISE. Father!

HARPAGON. It would get me out of debt.

ELISE. Father!

HARPAGON. I wouldn't have to complain about the economy?

ELISE. Father, will you let me speak?

HARPAGON. All right. What do you want to say?

ELISE (*A beat*) I forget.

CLEANTE. Why are you so worried? Everyone knows you are rich.

HARPAGON. What? rich? Me rich? Who rich? Me rich? Everyone lies about my money. False. False. Oh, enemies! Lie! Lie. Me rich? No rich. Me no no rich rich.

(Repeats more and more hysterically 'til ELISE and CLEANTE physically restrain him).

CLEANTE. Calm yourself, father.

HARPAGON. Woooo! No calm. No rich. Who rich? (*Etc.*)

ELISE. Send LA FLECHE for the Doctor.

HARPAGON. What? Doctor? Do you think I am a millionaire who can pay for a house call?

ELSIE. Can you be calm then?

HARPAGON. Oh, yes—calm. Plenty calm—the words “house call” are the best medicine to a poor man like me.

ELISE. That's better.

HARPAGON. Still it's a terrible thing for my children to join my enemies.

CLEANTE. How do we join your enemies?

HARPAGON. By talking about money—I don't have hidden in the garden—so that thinking I do have, robbers will come and knock me in the head thinking I . . .

HARPAGON, ELISE & CLEANTE. Have money buried in the garden.

HARPAGON. And another thing. The way you spend my money convinces people of the false idea that I am rich. Just look at

your clothes. To afford clothes like that you must be stealing from me. And I'll bet you have on more underneath.

CLEANTE. Just underwear.

HARPAGON. Aha, I knew it! Disgraceful! Why do you wear all those ribbons to keep your pants up? Safety pins would do just as well. Your own hair is free—why should you stick a wig on your head? And that hat! A piece of newspaper will keep your head just as dry and costs nothing if you pick it out of our neighbor's trash can.

CLEANTE. No doubt.

HARPAGON. Now, I have something to say to you.

ELISE. And we have something to say to you, father.

HARPAGON. Ah, ha! But I want to speak to you about marriage.

CLEANTE. That's what we want to talk about too.

ELISE. Oh, dear.

HARPAGON. What's the matter? Is it the word or the thing that scares you?

ELISE. We are afraid our ideas about marriage may not agree with yours.

HARPAGON. Bah. You have nothing to worry about. I have really fixed you both.

(CLEANTE and ELISE groan). Cleante, do you know a girl named Marianne?

CLEANTE. Oh, yes, father.

(Aside to ELISE) What a lucky day. She is the girl I am in love with.

HARPAGON. What's your opinion of her?

CLEANTE. Smashing!

HARPAGON. Is she worth considering?

CLEANTE. Yes, Yes, oh, yes.

HARPAGON. For a wife?

CLEANTE. Oh, yes—wife. Good wife.

HARPAGON. One problem. She is not rich and could not bring much of a dowry with her. Some dishes—a little linen—and little more. Very little money.

CLEANTE. What does a dowry matter when you are marrying such a wonderful girl?

HARPAGON. I'm not so sure, but if you feel so strongly about it, it's all settled.

CLEANTE. Thank you, father.

HARPAGON. I'll marry her in a few days.

CLEANTE. What?

HARPAGON. What do you mean, what?

CLEANTE. You are going to . . .

HARPAGON. Marry Marianne.

CLEANTE. Who, you? You? You?

HARPAGON. Yes, I, I, I.

(*Aside*). I said "I" didn't I?

CLEANTE. (*Firmly*). Father, I'm going to . . .

HARPAGON. Yes?

CLEANTE. Go lie down. (*Starts off*).

HARPAGON. What you need is some cold water!

(*To ELISE*) These young men have all the vigor of a chicken. Well, he'll cheer up when I tell him I've found a nice plump widow with lots of money for him.

ELISE. Oh, that'll cheer him up, all right.

(*Aside*). He'll be so happy, he'll probably join the army.

HARPAGON. Now, a surprise for you.

ELISE. For me?

HARPAGON. For you. Are you ready for your surprise?

ELISE. No.

HARPAGON. All right, here it is—it has not been easy, but I have arranged for you to marry old man Anselme.

ELISE. Old man Anselme.

HARPAGON. Old man Anselme.

ELISE. Thank you.

HARPAGON. That's all right.

ELISE. But no thank you.

HARPAGON. What?

ELISE. Pardon me, dear father, but I'd rather not marry him.

HARPAGON. Pardon me, dear Elise, but I'd rather you did.

ELISE. He's so old.

HARPAGON. Nonsense, He's on the right side of fifty.

ELISE. He's nearly sixty.

HARPAGON. That's what I mean.

ELISE. Sweet papa, I'm not ready to marry.

HARPAGON. Sweet daughter, dearest chick get ready.

ELISE. Excuse me, father.

HARPAGON. Excuse me, daughter.

ELISE. I am old man Anselme's very humble servant and your most obedient, respectful daughter, but if you don't mind, I will never marry that moldy, tottering antique.

HARPAGON. I am your very humble servant, but if it's all the same to you, you shall become Madame Antique—er, Anselme, this very evening.

ELISE. This evening?

HARPAGON. This evening.

ELISE. No.

HARPAGON. Yes.

ELISE. It's out of the question.

HARPAGON. Do you question my right to marry you to anyone I choose?

ELISE. I'll kill myself.

HARPAGON. Rest in peace.

ELISE. It'll be worth it.

HARPAGON. Any other girl would love to marry him.

ELISE. Ask any other girl.

HARPAGON. Ask anybody.

ELISE. All right, here comes your steward, ask him.

HARPAGON. Will you do what he says?

ELISE. I'll do anything he says.

(Enter VALERE). Oh, Valere,

(aside to Valere) I've promised to do whatever you say. If you love me, help me. But if he discovers we love each other he'll

send you away and we'll never be married. Stay in his good graces.

VALERE. Leave everything to me, my love.

HARPAGON. Ah, Valere. My daughter and I are arguing and . . .

VALERE. Oh, you are right, sir.

ELISE. What!

HARPAGON. Do you know what we are arguing about?

VALERE. No, but how could you be wrong?

HARPAGON. Ha! Good question! But, anyway, do you know Monsieur Anselme?

VALERE. That nice old gentleman with the big house?

HARPAGON. Right. Fine old gentleman.

VALERE. I understand he's an excellent old gentleman.

HARPAGON. Yes, and he wants to marry my daughter.

VALERE. Marry your daughter?

HARPAGON. You're surprised? He's surprised. I was surprised too. Imagine a wealthy, wise old fellow like that wanting my silly young daughter. But, of course I accepted. Now she says she won't marry him. Did you ever hear of anything so terrible?

VALERE. I never heard of anything so terrible.

HARPAGON. You see!

VALERE. I can't believe it.

HARPAGON. He can't believe it. You can tell he's shocked. Aren't you shocked?

VALERE. I'm shocked. I'm shocked.

ELISE. Does M. Valere really believe I should obey you and marry M. Anselme this very evening?

VALERE. This evening?

ELISE. Oh, yes. And I told my father I would obey his command if you believe he's right. Choose your words carefully, Steward.

VALERE. Yes, carefully.

ELISE. My father and I will do whatever you say.

HARPAGON. Now, what do you say, Steward?

VALERE. We musn't rush into this. I believe we should think it over for a few years . . .

HARPAGON. Impossible. Can't wait. If he gets immediate possession, he will take her without a dowry. It won't cost me a cent to get rid of her if he marries her tonight.

VALERE. Without a dowry?

HARPAGON. Without a dowry.

VALERE. Well, then I say . . .

HARPAGON. Nothing more to say, is there?

VALERE. Nothing.

HARPAGON. Nothing.

ELISE. Nothing?

VALERE. Of course, it might be said that your daughter's happiness is worth something.

HARPAGON. Without a dowry.

VALERE. That's right. However, think how much older he is than . . .

HARPAGON. Without a dowry.

VALERE. Yes, of course. But I'm sure a father wouldn't let his daughter be miserable just to save a little money.

HARPAGON. Without a dowry.

VALERE. True. Too true. Without a dowry.

HARPAGON. What's that? A dog barked. There must be someone in my garden after my money.

(*Stops, looks back at them*). That isn't there, of course. I'll be right back. (*EXIT*).

ELISE. Valere, how could you agree with him?

VALERE. We must pretend to agree with everything he says. We'll stop the wedding.

ELISE. How?

VALERE. Pretend you are sick.

ELISE. He'll send for a doctor and discover that I'm not sick.

VALERE. Don't be silly. What do doctors know? Pick any sickness—they will explain it in great detail.

HARPAGON (*Enters*). It was nothing. The dog was digging up my neighbor's flower garden.

VALERE. If nothing else works, we will run away together and leave the filthy old monster—