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SF PERUSALS

THE MISER

MOLIÈRE

Adapted by

MILES MALLESON

SAMUEL  FRENCH

LONDON

NEW YORK TORONTO SYDNEY HOLLYWOOD

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THE MISER

Produced at the New Theatre, London, on January 17th, 1950, with the following cast of characters:

(in the order of their appearance)

VALERE (*in love with Elise*)	*Michael Aldridge*
ELISE (*Harpagon's daughter*)	*Diana Churchill*
CLEANTE (*Harpagon's son*)	*John van Eyssen*
HARPAGON (*the Miser*)	*Miles Malleson*
LA FLECHE (*Cleante's servant*)	*Paul Rogers*
MASTER SIMON (*a moneylender*)	*Leo McKern*
FROSINE (*a scheming woman*)	*Angela Baddeley*
JACQUES (*Harpagon's servant*)	*George Benson*
1ST SERVANT	*Leslie Glazer*
2ND SERVANT	*William Eedle*
MARIANE (*in love with Cleante*)	*Jane Wenham*
JUSTICE OF THE PEACE	*Walter Hudd*
CLERK TO THE JUSTICE	*Norman Welsh*
SEIGNEUR ANSELM	*Mark Dignam*

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action of the play passes during one day in the house of Monsieur Harpagon in Paris, in the year 1668.

ACT I

SCENE 1.—A room in Harpagon's house. Morning.
SCENE 2.—The same. A little later.

ACT II

SCENE 1.—The same. Afternoon.
SCENE 2.—The same. Early evening.

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THE MISER

ACT I

SCENE 1

SCENE.—*A room in the house of* MONSIEUR HARPAGON *in Paris. The morning of a day in the year* 1668.

The setting is simple and formal. A backcloth depicts a large ornate fireplace C. *with windows* R. *and* L. *of it giving views of a garden. There are single wings* R. *and* L., *with exits above and below them. A plush upholstered settee with a high back, stands at an angle* R.C. *An armchair to match stands* L.C., *with a stool close to and* L. *of it. The furniture is shabby with the decorative fringes bedraggled and torn. Two heavy gilt chandeliers hang* R.C. *and* L.C.

(*See the Ground Plan at the end of the Play.*)

When the CURTAIN *rises,* ELISE *is seated on the settee at the* R. *end of it. She is a beautiful girl in her early twenties.* VALERE, *about the same age, is kneeling* L. *of her, clasping her hand, and gazing into her eyes.*

VALERE. Then you'll marry me, you'll marry me, you will ?

ELISE (*rising*). I will—I will.

VALERE (*rising ; fervently*). My darling. My beautiful. My love. (*He takes her in his arms.*) Elise.

(ELISE *sighs deeply.*)

What a sigh. And at this moment. When you've made me the happiest man in the whole wide world. Why do you sigh ? and so deeply ?

ELISE (*breaking down* R.). I sigh, Valere, when I think of my father. (*She turns.*) How angry he'll be : demented. There'll be paroxysms of rage. I dare not imagine what he'll say or do. And my family : how they'll disapprove. And the world. The world, too, will censure me. When I think of these things, I sigh. (*She pauses.*) But I sigh *deeply* when I remember you'll not always love me as you do now.

VALERE (*breaking* L.C. *and turning*). That's true enough.

ELISE (*breaking* C.). Valere !

VALERE (*moving in quickly to* L. *of* ELISE). I shall love you more. And more, and more. Oh my dear, suspect me of anything you will,

believe me capable of any crime—but not of that. Not of failing you. Never, never, never, of failing you.

ELISE. All men say such things.

VALERE. It's what we do that matters. You must believe me.

ELISE. I believe you. How easily we are persuaded by a lover. But I believe ; you'll love me always, and will be faithful to me. And if I were told that would be a miracle, I would reply—I still believe—in miracles. So I'll not sigh—deeply ; I'll just sigh.

VALERE. But why sigh at all ?

ELISE. My dear, if only others knew you, as I know you. When I think of all you've done for me. Given up—everything, forsaken your country, your home, your fortune—

(VALERE *turns and moves up* L.)

—your parents—to take service in my father's house.

VALERE (*turning*). I left my country, true—but it can hardly be said I *left* my parents—I *lost* them.

ELISE. Still no news ?

VALERE (*moving* C.). Well . . .

ELISE (*moving in quickly to* R. *of* VALERE). Valere ! News ? Good ? Bad ?

VALERE. Neither. Perhaps not even news. An old friend, who knew them well, and to whom I've given the charge of continuing the search, has sent me word. A hint—no more—that they may be yet alive.

ELISE. But, my dear, why didn't you tell me ?

VALERE (*easing above the armchair* L.C.). I've been wondering . . .

ELISE. Yes ?

VALERE (*turning*). Whether I ought **not** to—to go myself, and follow up this hint.

ELISE. And leave me ?

VALERE. For the time being.

ELISE. Oh, my dear. (*She moves in to* R. *of* VALERE.) Valere, this friend—you can trust him ?

VALERE. Absolutely.

ELISE. He can do everything that you could do ?

VALERE. Yes.

ELISE. Don't go. Not till you have further word. (*She crosses below the armchair* L.C. *to* L. *of the stool, and turns.*) If you were to leave my father's service now, he'd never take you back. And then how could I be with you ? Oh, stay here, close to me—and do your best to win my father's love.

VALERE. To win your father's love ?

ELISE. Yes.

VALERE. Impossible.

ELISE. But, why ?

VALERE. He has no love to win. (*He moves up* C.) No love for anything or anybody, but his moneybags.

(ELISE *sits on the stool, her back half turned to* VALERE.)

Forgive me, I have no right to speak to you so, of your father.

ELISE. But it's true. Only too horribly, ridiculously true— (*she turns and faces* VALERE) but how highly he thinks of *you*.

VALERE. And how easily his good opinion has been won. Oh yes (*he moves* C.) I'm learning quite a lot, in this rather unusual situation of mine. I'm learning that if you want a man to think well of you, all you have to do is to make him believe that you think as he thinks ; feel as he feels—like what he likes. Especially, you have to applaud his stupidities and—follies ; praise his shortcomings ; and, above all, flatter. Flatter, flatter, flatter. At every turn, in every way, and all the time. You can't overdo flattery. The more outrageous it is, the more they like it. (*He pauses.*) The most cunning, the most suspicious are deceived by it. There's nothing so inappropriate, so far-fetched, that they won't swallow, with a dose of flattery. (*He pauses.*) Of course, one's own integrity may suffer somewhat ; (*he moves below the settee*) but, even so, I flatter myself that the fault lies with the flatterer, not the flattered.

ELISE (*rising*). But, Valere, my dearest, (*she crosses below* VALERE *to* R. *of him*) why don't you seek the love of my brother ?

VALERE (*turning and facing* L.). That's impossible, too.

ELISE (*crossing to* L. *of* VALERE, *then turning and facing him*). Surely not ?

VALERE. Your brother is so exactly the opposite to your father, in all he says, and does, and is. I couldn't manage the two of 'em. (*He pauses.*) But your idea's a good one. (*He pauses.*) Why don't *you* take him into your confidence ; and tell him ?

ELISE (L. *of* VALERE *and facing* R.). Of us ?

VALERE (*looking off up* L.). Yes. Here he comes.

ELISE. I dare not. I haven't the courage.

VALERE. My dear, you would gain his sympathy, and *I* his help. I must go. (*He bows and kisses her hand.*) I have my work to do.

(*He turns abruptly, crosses above the settee and exits quickly up* R. *Simultaneously,* CLEANTE *enters excitedly up* L. *He is a year or so younger than* ELISE. *He is boyish, and impetuous, and just now is in a state of great excitement.*)

CLEANTE (*moving quickly to* ELISE *and clasping her in his arms*). Sister ! Thank God, I've found you ; and alone. (*He leads her below the settee.*) I want to talk to you. I've something to say to you. It's been on the tip of my tongue for days.

ELISE (R. *of* CLEANTE). Then why haven't you said it ?

CLEANTE. I dared not. I hadn't the courage.

ELISE. Brother ! (*She sits suddenly on the* R. *end of the settee.*) What is it you have to say ?

CLEANTE. So much, so much, so much. (*He pauses.*) Yet, I can say it in one word—love.

ELISE. Cleante . . .

CLEANTE (*quickly*). Sister, I'm in love. But before I say another word, I want you to understand that I realize I can go no further in this without the full knowledge and consent of my father.

ELISE (*in amazement*). Cleante . . .

CLEANTE (*ignoring the interruption*). I'm dependent on him. (*He pauses.*) He gave me life ; and therefore, everything. (*He pauses.*) After all, our parents are older than we are. We must always remember that. And, being older, they're beyond the clutches of passion. Their's is the cool judgement of reason. In this matter of marriage, our whole future is at stake ; obviously, for our own sakes, we should allow them, out of their so much greater experience and wisdom, to choose for us ; and abide by their decision, even when it's contrary to our own.

ELISE. Cleante . . .

CLEANTE. I'm saying all this to you, sister, to save you the trouble of saying it to me yourself— (*he moves to the stool* L.C.) because I don't propose to listen to a word of it.

ELISE. Brother !

CLEANTE. No, I've made up my mind. (*He sits on the stool.*) I mean to marry the lady I love ; and nothing you can say can alter that.

ELISE. Am I, then, so utterly lacking in sympathy ?

CLEANTE (*rising, moving to the settee and sitting on it* L. *of* ELISE). Oh no, no, no, no, no. (*He puts his right arm around her.*) But you're my sister—untouched by feelings like mine—

(ELISE *turns away from him.*)

—so cool, so sensible, so full of prudence.

ELISE. Oh Cleante ! (*She gazes out over the audience.*) Even the most sensible of us can be imprudent, thank Heaven, at least once in our lives.

CLEANTE. What d'you mean by that ?

ELISE. No matter ! (*She turns and faces* CLEANTE.) It's *you* I'd hear about. Who is she ?

CLEANTE (*rising*). Who is she ! Oh, Elise ! (*He is swept up on a rising tide of ecstasy. But there is no pose in his behaviour. He is just a very young man hopelessly in love for the first time, and completely uninhibited about it. He crosses quickly below* ELISE, *moves up* R. *of the settee, then to* C. *above it, turns and faces her.*) Her eyes ! Her hair ! Her mouth !

ELISE. Yes, but . . .

CLEANTE. So young ! So fresh ! So sweet !

ELISE. Yes, yes, but . . .

CLEANTE. Her voice ! Her laugh !

ELISE. Yes, yes, yes, but . . .

CLEANTE (*moving up* L.C.). The way she moves ! Her grace ! Her modesty ! Her charm !

ELISE. But who is she ? Her name ?

CLEANTE (*turning to face* ELISE). Her name ! (*He pauses. Rapturously.*) Mariane—Mar-i-ane.

ELISE. Mariane.

CLEANTE (*moving to the settee and sitting on it* L. *of* ELISE). And she lives quite close to here : with her mother. They live alone together. Her mother's an invalid. And Mariane looks after her. And with what loving care ! What tenderness ! What sympathy ! So patient ! So long-suffering ! So uncomplaining ! (*He rises and moves down* L.) And they aren't well off.

ELISE. No ?

CLEANTE. No. The father's dead ; and now they've very little money. (*He sits on the stool* L.C.) Elise, can you imagine anything more maddening—here we are, by far the biggest house in the neighbourhood ; everybody knows father's rolling in money. (*He pauses.*) I long to be able to help—if only to give the mother a few delicacies, and Mariane a few pleasures. But because we're not allowed a single penny for ourselves, I can't give Mariane even the slightest token of my affection.

ELISE (*rising and moving quickly to* CLEANTE). Poor Cleante ! (*She kneels at his feet,* R. *of him.*)

CLEANTE (*almost in tears*). I'm desperate. I'm being driven to the most ridiculous subterfuges to try and borrow money—just to have something to spend on her. (*He pauses.*) But it can't go on like this. I mean to have it out with him.

ELISE (*after a pause*). With father ?

CLEANTE. Yes.

ELISE. What will you say to him ?

CLEANTE (*after a pause*). Tell him of my love ; and more, my determination to get married—if he doesn't agree, if he refuses his consent, I shall—I shall——

ELISE. Yes ?

CLEANTE. Do something desperate.

ELISE (*kneeling up to* CLEANTE). Oh, what ?

CLEANTE (*rising*). I shall, I shall—leave this house.

ELISE. Where will you go ?

CLEANTE (*with a magnificent gesture*). Away ! Right away !

ELISE. And leave Mariane ?

CLEANTE. No, no, no. I shall take her with me.

ELISE. And what will you live on ?

CLEANTE. There you are. (*He crosses below* ELISE *to* R.C. *and stands with his back to her.*) I knew you'd make difficulties.

ELISE (*rising and moving in to* L. *of* CLEANTE'S *back*). Brother ! My dear ! I'm not *making* difficulties. (*She moves quickly above* CLEANTE *to* R. *of him and faces him.*) I'm pointing them out.

CLEANTE. I don't care, something's got to be done. It's *insufferable*—the way he keeps us both penniless. We have to bargain with the tradesmen for the very clothes on our backs.

HARPAGON (*off up* L. ; *shouting*). Don't stand there, gaping—you great oaf—get along with you.

CLEANTE (*crossing below* ELISE *to* R. *of her and turning*). There he is.

HARPAGON (*off ; shouting*). Out of my sight !

CLEANTE (*moving up* R.). Who's he shouting at ? (*He moves up* R.C. *and looks off up* L.) My own servant ! (*He turns to* ELISE.)

(ELISE *moves below the settee, then to* R. *of it.*)

Sister, we must join forces against him.

(*There is a loud racket off up* L., *and* HARPAGON'S *voice is heard uttering indistinct threats.*)

ELISE (*marching above the settee to* R. *of* CLEANTE *and shaking hands with him*). Agreed !

(CLEANTE *exits quickly up* R.C. ELISE *turns and quickly follows him off.* LA FLECHE, *who is* CLEANTE'S *servant, enters hurriedly up* L. *and backs to* L. *of the settee. He is followed on by* HARPAGON, *who stands up* L., *and shakes his stick at* LA FLECHE.)

HARPAGON. You gallows bird, you ! That's what you are—a gallows bird !

LA FLECHE (*breaking down* R. ; *muttering*). The wicked old skinflint ! (*Behind his hand to the audience.*) He's so mean !

HARPAGON. What's that ? (*He moves quickly to* R.C.). What are you muttering—grumbling to yourself ? If you've got anything to say, say it. Speak out.

LA FLECHE (*turning to* HARPAGON). I want to know what it's all about. What are you turning me out for ?

HARPAGON (*threatening* LA FLECHE *with his stick*). How dare you bandy words with me !

(LA FLECHE *dodges to* R. *of the settee.*)

(*He moves below the settee.*) Away with you ! (*He chases* LA FLECHE *up* R. *of the settee.*) Out you go !

(LA FLECHE *runs across above the settee and armchair* L.C., *then down* L.)

(*He moves above the settee and then to* L. *of it.*) Out, out, out !

LA FLECHE (*moving* C.). Your son told me to wait for him here.

HARPAGON. Then go and wait for him in the street. Not in my house. I won't have you in the place—not a moment longer. (*He circles* LA FLECHE *as he speaks, first moving* R. *of him, then below him, and finishing down* L. *of him.*)

(LA FLECHE *follows* HARPAGON *with his eyes.*)

Hanging about all day and never doing a hand's turn ; never moving ; stock-still. (*He pauses.*) Like one of the door-posts. Only door-posts haven't got eyes. You have. And they follow me about,

everywhere. Watching. Trying to see if there's anything you can steal.

LA FLECHE (*facing* HARPAGON). Steal ! A fat chance anybody has to steal anything in this house. Everything under lock and key.

HARPAGON (*moving in close to* L. *of* LA FLECHE). You're spying on me—that's what you're doing. You know I've got things hidden away. (*He claps his hand quickly to his mouth and turns away, horrified at having said too much.*)

LA FLECHE (*quickly*). Have you ?

HARPAGON (*turning to* LA FLECHE). What ?

LA FLECHE. Got things hidden away ?

HARPAGON. I didn't say so.

LA FLECHE. Yes, you did.

HARPAGON (*breaking down* L.C.). Oh, God forgive me—what am I saying ? (*He turns to* LA FLECHE.) Get out !

(LA FLECHE *turns and runs up* R.)

Come back ! (*He moves* C.)

(LA FLECHE *stops, turns and moves to* L. *of the settee.*)

What are you taking with you ?

LA FLECHE. Thoughts.

HARPAGON. What have you got in your hand ?

(LA FLECHE *holds out his right hand, empty.*)

The other one.

(LA FLECHE *holds out his left hand, empty.*)

Your pockets ?

LA FLECHE. Come and see for yourself.

(HARPAGON *moves above* LA FLECHE, *and from behind him, feels and pats* LA FLECHE'S *trousers pockets.* LA FLECHE *giggles.*)

HARPAGON (*moving down* L. *of* LA FLECHE). And your breeches ? (*He points with his stick to* LA FLECHE'S *breeches.*) Look at your breeches. There's enough room in 'em to carry away half my household. (*He crosses below* LA FLECHE *to the settee, puts his stick down on it, then bending a little, feels around the bottom edge of* LA FLECHE'S *breeches.*)

(LA FLECHE *smacks* HARPAGON, *who passes above him, then eases down* L.C.)

LA FLECHE. Have you quite finished ? (*Behind his hand to the audience.*) A plague on all misers.

HARPAGON (*turning quickly to* LA FLECHE). What's that ?

LA FLECHE (*moving in close to* R. *of* HARPAGON ; *loudly*). A plague on all misers.

HARPAGON. And what d'you mean by that ?

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