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The Miser

by Freyda Thomas

Inspired by Molière's *L'Avare*

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



**SAMUEL
FRENCH**

FOUNDED 1830

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CHARACTERS

HARPAGON - 60s, a miser

ELISE - early 20s, his daughter

VALERE - valet to Harpagon, in love with Elise

CLEANTE - son to Harpagon, in love with Marianne

MARIANNE - 18, the girl next door

LA FLECHE - 20s, 30s, valet to Cleante, disguises himself as a German marriage contractor

MAITRE JACQUES - young to middle-age, Ze chef

FROSINE - 40ish, a marriage broker, disguises herself as the lisping Mme. Poquelin

MAITRE SIMON - young to middle-age, a broker, also plays Inspector Sansclou

INSPECTOR SANSCLOU - the original Clouseau, played by the Actor playing Simon

SEÑOR ANSELME - the Deus ex Machina, 50s, father to both Marianne and Valere

For Eyanna and Angelina
My nieces and the light in my life

ACT ONE

(The shabby salon of HARPAGON. Sparsely furnished. One entrance stage right to the front door, one entrance stage left to the kitchen and other parts of the house. Entrance to the garden upstage center with large glass windows and a door. One old sofa with a pillow on it in the salon. Discoloration on the walls where paintings once hung. HARPAGON is discovered, downstage left, alone, sitting at a writing desk, with quill pen, paper, and piles of coins. He is doing the bills. He speaks alone.)

HARPAGON. Fifteen sous for the horses! The horses!? Animals!? What are they eating!? Golden oats!? Ridiculous. Six, and not a penny more.

(He counts out a few coins.)

Wages, the cook. Why do we need a cook? My daughter, my son, my house-man, my cook—All these people underfoot, depending on me for their livelihood! Costing money every time they lift a spoon. They're going to break me, all of them! Especially my ungrateful, spoiled children who want things, things, things! And I'm the supplier. We won't make it through the day with these bills. *(looking through list)* Shoes resoled? Oh, yes, mine.

(He counts out the coins and places them with the others.)

My son would just go and buy a new pair. My son has to have a valet! He can't put on his own clothes!?

(He checks off the list.)

Well, that's it. And we've got some left over. But it's never enough. Precious little. God knows we're going to need it. But it's not enough! I've got to make more.

HARPAGON. *(cont.)* How can I make more? Who makes more out there? Who always has enough money? Hah! The money lenders—the blood-sucking money lenders! If I want to have enough, I have to become one of them! It's as simple as that. I've got to find someone to help me get a money-lending business going. Who do I know? Hah! Send someone to fetch him. Valere! Valere!

(no response)

Where can he be off to? Where is everybody when I need them! La Fleche!? LA FLECHE!?!? I told my son that valet of his was a good-for-nothing, but did he listen!? Jacques! Jacques!?!?

(JACQUES comes bolting into the room, apron on, slapping his chef's hat on.)

MAITRE JACQUES. Oui, monsieur! Shall I prepare a dinner!?

HARPAGON. No, no no. I want you to go on an errand.

MAITRE JACQUES. Oh, for some cutlets? Some fromage? Shall I bring 'ome somesing speciale for tonight?

HARPAGON. No, no no! Your vegetable soup is perfectly fine.

MAITRE JACQUES. Oui, monsieur. But I make eet every night.

HARPAGON. And you'll go on making it every night, as long as we have vegetables from the garden. Gardens are thrifty.

MAITRE JACQUES. Oui, monsieur.

HARPAGON. Here, take this note to the market. Look for a man.

MAITRE JACQUES. Oui monsieur. *(He starts to go, then stops.)* Could you be a beet more specifique?

HARPAGON. He looks foreign.

MAITRE JACQUES. Foreign. From where?

HARPAGON. I don't know! He's very strangely dressed. He was pointed out to me last week.

MAITRE JACQUES. Ah, oui.

(He looks to the audience for help.)

HARPAGON. And don't come back without an answer.

MAITRE JACQUES. Oui, monsieur. *(He starts to go, dejected.)*

Are you sure you don't want—

HARPAGON. I'M SURE!

(MAITRE JACQUES goes. HARPAGON puts his coins into a cashbox, locks it, puts the key in his pocket, looks around the room, starts for the garden, then hears the offstage voices of ELISE and VALERE)

STAY OUT! OUT!

(The voices stop abruptly.)

Can't let them see the cashbox. Can't let anyone know where I hide it. They'd rob me blind. DON'T ANYONE COME IN HERE, DO YOU HEAR ME! Not to worry, nobody will find it where I've buried it. Who would think of looking in the garden!? That's right—grow your own vegetables, it's much cheaper. And they grow so much faster and larger with gold under them!

(He exits upstage center into the garden, which can only partially be seen from the audience. LA FLECHE enters from behind the screen.)

LA FLECHE. Screens are very useful things. You can learn so much. I think I'll hold on to that information for a while. I have a feeling it will come in handy.

(He exits. A pause, then enter ELISE and VALERE. ELISE is carrying a basket of clothes, VALERE has a dustpan and broom. They look around the room, see no one, drop their items and rush into each other's arms. as they speak their opening lines.)

VALERE. I love you.

ELISE. I love you.

VALERE. I love you more.

ELISE. Impossible.

VALERE. Very possible...

(another kiss)

ELISE. Oh but, dearest, I can't help worrying about how all of this is going to turn out.

VALERE. You know, you're a lot like your father, sometimes.

ELISE. I am not!

VALERE. You're both worrywarts. He just worries about money.

ELISE. Well, so do I! How can we marry without it? And where can we get some? And will you still love me if it takes us ten years, or worse, if we have to wait for him to die!?

VALERE. He'll never die. He's too cheap to pay for a funeral.

ELISE. Don't joke.

VALERE. All right, no jokes. How about kisses?

(They approach for another go, and—)

HARPAGON. *(from the garden)* Ungrateful brats! Children! A waste of time and money. Bloodsuckers!

(ELISE and VALERE break their embrace and turn from each other. HARPAGON re-enters from the garden and speaks to ELISE.)

Well? Did you finish the mending? Make the beds? Dust? Have you finished your chores?

ELISE. Almost, father.

HARPAGON. Hah! Slacker! *(to VALERE)* Valere! Did you sweep the stairs?

VALERE. I have, sir.

HARPAGON. You should have been my son, instead of that ungrateful money-grubbing lout I spawned. *(to ELISE)* Your brother is a leech, and you're no better!

VALERE. I'm sure both your children love and respect you, sir.

HARPAGON. Hah! Always asking for things, things, things! Why does a girl need more than one dress? Why does a young man need a horse? He should walk, get

exercise. Exercise keeps you trim. Then you don't need as much food. It's hard enough feeding everyone in this house on one little garden.

ELISE. It seems to be doing very well, father.

HARPAGON. (*terrified*) The garden!? Why, yes. I was just checking on the progress. Making sure no worms are eating our food. That's all we've got, you know.

ELISE. So you've said.

VALERE. I'll be happy to pull the worms off the plants, sir, in my spare time.

HARPAGON. NO! I mean, it's a sensitive garden. Everything wilts if a stranger goes in. It likes me—only me. Stay out of the garden or we'll all starve. Both of you. Everybody. Do you hear me!? OUT!

(*He exits, growling and grumbling.*)

ELISE. I have to admit that I wish sometimes that my father was...someone else.

VALERE. Who?

ELISE. Anyone else.

VALERE. You must be patient a little longer, my love. It will work out. You have to learn how to...play him, like a harpsichord. Strike the right note and make a beautiful melody. We'll find a way to make an entire symphony together. Love always triumphs.

ELISE. I'm so afraid you'll give up on me and leave. I don't know why you've bothered hanging around here so many weeks. It's so...gloomy.

VALERE. Not when I look at you.

ELISE. You don't look at me. Men only look at you when they want you.

VALERE. And I want you all the time. I just can't...look when your father is around. You don't want him to guess, do you? And he's around, you notice. All the time.

ELISE. I know. He's so irascible and crabby. He wasn't always like this. He used to be...almost generous. It's just since this...

BOTH. Economic downturn.

ELISE. What can we do? We can't afford to run away. He doesn't even pay you a salary!

VALERE. I know.

ELISE. I don't know why you stay. You should leave me and go search for your poor lost family.

VALERE. You know why I stay.

(They kiss. HARPAGON re-enters, crossing and mumbling. ELISE and VALERE break the kiss. ELISE picks up a garment and pretends to sew. VALERE grabs the dustpan and broom and sweeps.)

HARPAGON. Ugh, this economy. It's killing me!

(He exits to the other side. ELISE and VALERE go back to kissing.)

ELISE. I'm so...FRUSTRATED!

VALERE. You are!? I've wanted to marry you ever since the first moment I laid eyes on you.

ELISE. Under water?

VALERE. Under water, hair all billowed out—you looked like a mermaid.

ELISE. A drowning mermaid. And you saved my life. I'll never forget that horrible shipwreck.

VALERE. I loved that shipwreck. It brought you to me.

ELISE. Oh, I want to shout to the world, "Look at this wonderful man who loves me!"

VALERE. Not yet, my darling. Your father would throw me into the street, and then we wouldn't see each other every day. Not yet.

(They kiss again, then break quickly when they hear HARPAGON with LA FLECHE offstage. HARPAGON and LA FLECHE enter, cross, and exit to the other side.)

HARPAGON. I called you before and you didn't answer! Probably off stealing something of mine. You're nothing but a common thief! Out of my house!

LA FLECHE. What!? What did I steal!?

HARPAGON. I don't know! When I catch you, I'll find out what!

LA FLECHE. I swear on my mother's grave—

HARPAGON. Your mother's alive!

LA FLECHE. When she finds out you called me a thief, it'll kill her.

(They exit, running. ELISE and VALERE go back to their embrace.)

ELISE. How long can we go on like this!? Oh, why won't my father give me my pitiful little inheritance from my mother? We could run away together.

VALERE. A little patience, my love. It will all work out. Meanwhile I'll continue to play up to your father, keep him as calm as possible, and we'll have our stolen moments.

ELISE. I don't know how you tolerate him. I always lose my temper.

VALERE. I know you do, and it only makes him worse! You have to learn how to make it a kind of game. Today I gave him six compliments and I got him where I wanted him. Yesterday I had to give him eight. It's almost mathematical. How strongly do I play upon his fears until he gives in? And make no mistake, that man is riddled with fear. When I get a little tired, a little bored with the ridiculousness of it all, I look at you. That's the trick. Keep your eye on the prize.

ELISE. How do you know you'll win it?

VALERE. I'd say I already have. Just the delivery is missing.

ELISE. Yes, one small delivery. And the money.

(They share another kiss. ELISE breaks it.)

ELISE. My brother!

VALERE. Cléante? What about him?

ELISE. He has a little money. Father had to give him his part of mother's inheritance—he had to, Cléante is older. And a man. He might lend us enough to get away!

VALERE. I don't want to take money I'm not sure I can pay back. Who knows if I'll find my relatives? I lost them so long ago, they may not be alive any longer.

ELISE. You must find them. I know Cléante will help us.

CLEANTE. (*entering, jubilant and well-dressed*) Did someone mention my name?

ELISE. Cléante! You look so...nice.

CLEANTE. I know! I spent practically my last sous on this. And some other things.

ELISE. You're out of money!?

CLEANTE. Just about.

VALERE. So much for that idea.

ELISE. Why did you spend all your money on clothes!?

CLEANTE. Because clothes make the man, and this man is...in love!

ELISE. You're in love?

VALERE. He's in love.

CLEANTE. I'm in love.

ELISE. You weren't in love yesterday.

CLEANTE. Well, I am today!

ELISE. That's impossible! You can't fall in love so quickly.

VALERE. Can't you?

CLEANTE. You've never been in love. You couldn't know how it is.

VALERE. (*interrupting ELISE, who is about to refute that statement*) You're right—she couldn't know.

ELISE. Well, who is she?

CLEANTE. Who is she? Who is she? Just the sweetest, dearest, kindest, most beautiful creature anyone has ever laid eyes on.

ELISE. And her name is...

CLEANTE. Marianne. (*singing*) Marianne, Marianne, oh my dear Marianne...

VALERE. Nice name.

ELISE. How did you meet?

CLEANTE. (*still singing*) How did we meet? How did we meet? Why, down the street, down this very street!

VALERE. He really is in love, isn't he?

ELISE. It would appear so.

CLEANTE. She lives right down the street. Just moved in, with her poor, frail, invalid mother.

ELISE & VALERE. (*all sympathy*) Ohh.

CLEANTE. Oh, you should see the way Marianne takes care of her—caters to her, tends to her every little need. No mother could ask for a better daughter.

VALERE. And no man could ask for a better wife?

CLEANTE. Yes, exactly!

ELISE. And have you informed our father of this...event?

CLEANTE. Oh, father. You would go and spoil it. He won't like her.

VALERE. Why not?

CLEANTE. They're not exactly rich.

VALERE. Not exactly rich. How not exactly rich are they?

CLEANTE. Poor.

ELISE. Ah, just like us.

CLEANTE. Us!? If we knew where father was hiding his fortune, we'd all be set for life. I could get married, La Fleche could get a raise, you could get a new gown and find a husband!

VALERE. Imagine that. You think he has money hidden somewhere around here?

CLEANTE. I'm sure of it. He sold off all his assets a while back. I heard him. The walls have ears.

VALERE. And not much else.

CLEANTE. He doesn't trust the banks or the investment houses any more. I think he's turned everything into gold! And I'm going to find out where it is.

ELISE. Well, I hope you're in a sharing mood when you do.

CLEANTE. Don't you worry. He has just so over-reacted to this... what-would-you-call-it...crunch the country is in. It will pass, it always does. You have to keep a positive attitude.

ELISE. When have you ever seen him with a positive attitude?

CLEANTE. Once, when I was very little. Well, I have a positive attitude, why can't he?

ELISE. I think you got that from mother.

CLEANTE. Oh, if only mother could have met Marianne. I'm sure she would have approved. If only I could bring her here, invite her over, but how could I invite anyone to this...disgusting hovel? He sold all the furniture, the paintings, and the rugs to buy gold. It used to look so elegant!

ELISE. Well, it's clean, I can guarantee you that.

VALERE. He must be hoarding the gold somewhere in the house.

CLEANTE. I've looked high and low, in the middle of the night, when he's asleep. Meanwhile, I have a plan to borrow some money to, well, fix up the place for an afternoon, so I can invite my dear, sweet Marianne to come over. Perhaps throw a dinner party! A nice, juicy boeuf bourguignon, escargots, Crème Chantilly...

VALERE. I hope she's a vegetarian. The only meal you'll get out of him will be from the garden. Have you seen his horses? He doesn't even feed them. You could play a minuet on their ribs with a stick.

CLEANTE. It's so unfair!

(HARPAGON's voice, offstage)

Here he comes! I'm going out to find my valet. I sent him to find a money lender who can arrange everything! Dinner tonight at eight!

VALERE. And we have chores to finish!

(They exit as LA FLECHE enters, being chased by HARPAGON.)

HARPAGON. GET OUT!

(LA FLECHE starts to go.)

STOP!

LA FLECHE. (*stopping*) Which is it?

HARPAGON. I want you out of my house. But I want to make sure you're not taking anything with you. Come over here.

(**LA FLECHE** slowly starts toward **HARPAGON**, *speaks aside.*)

LA FLECHE. (*aside, to audience*) I don't think I'm going to like this. You know, I'd rather just leave, but I can't. There's no work out there! And his son is paying me, so I have to put up with his...his...well, you see what he's like.

(*He stands before HARPAGON.*)

HARPAGON. (*pointing to his breeches*) What have you got in there?

LA FLECHE. What have I got!? The same as any man. Maybe a little more.

HARPAGON. Aha!

(**HARPAGON** starts to stick his hand in **LA FLECHE**'s breeches. **LA FLECHE** pulls away.)

LA FLECHE. Hey hey hey! I don't think so.

HARPAGON. You're hiding something, I know it!

LA FLECHE. I'm hiding what everybody hides! And you're not going in there!

HARPAGON. Empty your pockets, then, all of them.

(**LA FLECHE** starts emptying a host of different pockets: bits of string, buttons, strange looking tools, toys, a very long scarf, etc, which he dumps into **HARPAGON**'s hands.)

LA FLECHE. There. There's your fortune. Spend it wisely.

HARPAGON. (*mumbling to himself*) He thinks he's outsmarted me, but he hasn't.

LA FLECHE. Talking to himself? Not a good sign. Clearly the man is a lunatic.

HARPAGON. Who's talking to whose self?

LA FLECHE. Who's picking on whom?

HARPAGON. I don't want you anywhere near me! You're always spying on me, every time I turn around, there you are, like a beanpole with huge bug eyes, looking here and there, looking for things to steal from me.

LA FLECHE. Look, let's be sensible about this. How could anyone steal so much as a carrot from you? You count the tomatoes on the vines out there every day! Everything else you have is locked up, hidden and guarded night and day!

HARPAGON. (*overheard aside*) Has he seen me in the garden?

LA FLECHE. Have I seen you where?

HARPAGON. Nowhere! Nowhere! I bet it's you who told everybody I have money hidden in the house.

LA FLECHE. You have money hidden in the house!?

HARPAGON. Who said that!?

LA FLECHE. Said what?

HARPAGON. That there's money hidden in the house!

LA FLECHE. There is!?

HARPAGON. I didn't say that!

LA FLECHE. Oh yes you did!

HARPAGON. (*getting confused*) You're deliberately confusing me.

LA FLECHE. Yes, and I do it so well, don't I?

HARPAGON. You keep your mouth shut out there. I don't want you spreading rumors that I have money hidden all over the place. Robbers will be crawling everywhere.

LA FLECHE. Please. It's common knowledge. There are people, on this very street, who are losing their homes, their livelihoods, everything, and they wonder why you're not suffering like they are. So they speculate.

HARPAGON. Well, they're wrong. I'm as poor as everybody else. I don't know how we'll make it through this year, this month. Put food in my children's mouths. Well, not for much longer. I'm going to marry them off! A

rich husband for Elise, a rich wife for Cleante, and I'll save a fortune in food, clothing, horses— I can rent out their rooms!

LA FLECHE. And who will clean your house and take care of you? You're no...spring chicken. Oh, chicken, when was the last time we had a fowl for dinner, instead of a foul dinner? A plague on stinginess and people who live by it.

HARPAGON. What was that!?

LA FLECHE. What was what?

HARPAGON. What you just said?

LA FLECHE. What did I just say?

HARPAGON. Something about stinginess.

LA FLECHE. Did I?

HARPAGON. Didn't you? I heard you!

LA FLECHE. Well then, I guess I said it.

HARPAGON. Said what?

LA FLECHE. What?

HARPAGON. What you said!

LA FLECHE. What did I *say*?

HARPAGON. Yes!

LA FLECHE. I said yes?

HARPAGON. No!

LA FLECHE. No?

HARPAGON. You're doing it again!

LA FLECHE. What am I doing!

HARPAGON. Driving me mad, you—you cockroach!

LA FLECHE. Sou-scraper!

HARPAGON. Imbecile!

LA FLECHE. Warthog!

HARPAGON. Dolt!

LA FLECHE. Selfish, tight-fisted old fool! (*aside*) This is a useful exchange. (*to HARPAGON*) Conversations that don't provide true communication or useful information are a waste of time and energy. I'm going outside to await your son's further instructions.

(The doorbell rings.)

HARPAGON. Ah, that's the marriage broker I called. Send her in on your way out.

LA FLECHE. I couldn't do that. I'm only an imbecile! *(aside)* But this imbecile is going to hang around, spy, and report to my master! *(He hides behind a screen.)*

HARPAGON. Never mind. Knowing Frosine, she'll come in anyway.

(HARPAGON goes to his desk, takes out some papers, and talks to the audience)

You know, it's very nerve-wracking keeping a huge sum of money in one's house. But where else is it safe these days? Clever is the man who can find the perfect hiding place for such an amount. Forget about safes! That's the first place they go. Stuffed in the mattress? They'll just as soon stab you in the middle of the night, then stab the mattress and take it all, leaving you to bleed to death. But the garden is worrisome too! One stray dog who likes the smell of gold and pfft! I'm barely sleeping at night. Every little moan and groan that the house makes and I'm on my feet with a shovel, ready to attack. Oh, how's a man to live any more with even a little peace of mind!? Whoops! Madame Frosine. I hope she didn't overhear!

(FROSINE enters, shabby chic.)

Madame Frosine! How long have you been there?

FROSINE. *(making a grand entrance)* Monsieur Harpagon! I just arrived. And what a pleasure to see you!

HARPAGON. And you. You—uh—didn't hear anything unusual as you came in?

FROSINE. You were mumbling something about gardens. I love gardens, don't you? And you have such a delightful one!

HARPAGON. Yes, it's all right. We get vegetables from it. Just vegetables. That's all. Nothing but vegetables. I mean, what else would there be in a garden?

FROSINE. Oh come now, you know what else!

HARPAGON. No, I don't!

FROSINE. Why, flowers, monsieur! Beautiful flowers to give to a lady who tickles your fancy.

HARPAGON. My fancy doesn't need any more tickling. I'm done with that.

FROSINE. I don't believe it. Why look at you, you're the picture of health. I swear, you look younger and more virile every day.

HARPAGON. I do?

FROSINE. I know a few thirty year olds who look and act older than you.

HARPAGON. But I'm past sixty! Well, just a little.

FROSINE. The prime of life! You must tell me your secret.

HARPAGON. I don't eat much.

FROSINE. Ah, I must try that some time.

HARPAGON. Yes, you should. You'd be surprised how much money you'll save.

FROSINE. Oh money! If you only knew the trouble I'm having—

HARPAGON. Yes, aren't we all? But let's discuss our business. I sent for you because—

FROSINE. You want to remarry!

HARPAGON. Who, me!?

FROSINE. I saw it in your eyes the minute I walked in. That gleam, that fire that says only one thing.

HARPAGON. Me!?

FROSINE. Why not? Give me your hand.

HARPAGON. YOU!?

FROSINE. No, silly goose. Three husbands were enough for me. Although, monsieur Harpagon, when I look at you, I'm sorely tempted! Now, let me see your life line. I'm an expert at these things. There, you see?

(She runs her nail across his hand and halfway up his arm. It tickles and he laughs.)

FROSINE. My, my my! It just goes on and on! You're going to live to be 120!

HARPAGON. I am?

FROSINE. Absolutely. And you'll want someone to care for you, and tend your house, and see to your every little need.

HARPAGON. I hadn't thought about that. I was thinking about marrying off my children.

FROSINE. All the more reason for *you* to get married! You'll be all alone here, wandering through these lonely, empty rooms— (*aside*) What happened to all his furniture? I heard he was filthy rich. (*back to him*) And I can help you with all three arrangements.

HARPAGON. Well. Let's talk about the children first.

FROSINE. Ah, the children. Life's most precious gift. How sad you must be to lose them.

HARPAGON. Huh? Oh yes, sad, sad, very sad.

FROSINE. So, let us begin with your son. A beautiful young man, strapping, handsome, refined, he should be no problem.

HARPAGON. I want a rich widow for my son. Older, I think. Someone well-endowed.

FROSINE. Ah, your son likes the mature, full-figured woman.

HARPAGON. Well-endowed monetarily. I want him married to a rich woman who will...offer me a sizeable sum in exchange for my son and his...youthful gifts.

FROSINE. Oh. Very sensible. Hmm. A rich widow. I think I know just the woman. She's a bit older than he is, but she has been left very well off.

HARPAGON. Does she want to remarry? Some of them don't, you know.

FROSINE. Who wouldn't want a handsome, young, virile man on her arm at any age!? I'll have to send a note to her and see if she's available. You may remember her. She used to live next door to you years ago. Madame Poquelin. (*poke-lán*)

HARPAGON. I remember that name. There was a scandal in the family.

FROSINE. Yes, alas. They moved away when the eldest son ran off to become... an actor.

HARPAGON. Madame Poquelin. Get in touch with her immediately. She sounds perfect.

FROSINE. Indeed I will. You'll remember her the instant you see her. She has a...memorable face. That nose, that wart with the hairs, the pock marks, oh and remember that lisp!?

HARPAGON. I remember the family had money.

FROSINE. Now she has it.

HARPAGON. How nice for me—her!

FROSINE. (*aside*) My mother should have chosen more carefully when I married the first time. The old goat spent all his money at the casinos and left me holding the dice. (*to HARPAGON*) I'll send a message to her today. Now, as for your daughter—

HARPAGON. This one will be easy. Señor Anselme, living in the next street, is looking to take a young wife. He's seen Elise and likes what he sees. And he'll take her without a dowry.

FROSINE. Without a dowry! Ah, you are a most thrifty and frugal man, so sensible when it comes to money. No wonder you're so wealthy.

HARPAGON. Who says I'm wealthy?

FROSINE. Oh, no one in particular. I'm just guessing that a smart—

LA FLECHE. (*aside from behind the screen; FROSINE hears him.*) Stingy—

FROSINE. – Industrious man like you must have something stashed away for these rainy days we're all having.

HARPAGON. I wish I did! But my children, they cost me a fortune, and there's this house to run, and the servants to be paid, and the horses...

FROSINE. Yes, I've seen your horses. Have you sent for the vet yet? Must be some dreadful disease.

LA FLECHE. (*peeking out from behind the screen*) Starvation.

HARPAGON. So, you'll arrange everything?

FROSINE. The full package. Of course, you'll want to throw a little dinner party, for Señor Anselme, and the wealthy widow—if she says yes, and for your fiancée!

HARPAGON. Mine?

FROSINE. Yours. Come, sir, have you ever seen me involved in any matchmaking endeavor that I did not successfully, completely and perfectly conclude? The man or woman does not exist for whom I cannot find the most delectable, the most suitable, the most delightful partner. And I know just the girl for you.

HARPAGON. Girl?

FROSINE. Young, sweet, innocent, kind, beautiful—

HARPAGON. But I'm an older—middle-aged man.

FROSINE. Have you never heard of the young girl who looks for...papá? This one, monsieur, has seen you in the neighborhood, and is delighted, dare I say, ravished by what she has seen. (*aside*) God forgive me for such a lie. Her poor, frail invalid mother is worried about her future and needs her married to someone who will provide. And she's so beautiful and sweet, that I'm wagering even this old crab will have to melt. (*to him*) Believe me, monsieur, this is a match made in heaven!

HARPAGON. I suppose I am in good form.

FROSINE. No, superb form! She talks of nothing else! She wants a portrait of you!

HARPAGON. Very flattering. But, you know, I do have a touch of phlegm from time to time.

FROSINE. Phlegm! She adores a good, solid, phlegmy cough!

HARPAGON. Really? (*he demonstrates*)

FROSINE. Oh yes. That's what led me to think of you remarrying. I spoke to her of the possibility and she went nearly mad with joy. (*aside*) Well, her mother did. That's not too much of a stretch.

HARPAGON. Mad with joy—think of it!

FROSINE. Yes, do think of it. Admired from afar, and soon to be near.

HARPAGON. I could send my horses and carriage for her.

FROSINE. (*aside*) Those horses couldn't pull a baby carriage! (*to him*) She would prefer to walk. She's a young, robust, healthy girl who loves exercise.

HARPAGON. Ah. Well, you've pointed out all her merits...

FROSINE. And they are many—

HARPAGON. Except you haven't mentioned—

FROSINE. Her name! Of course. It's Marianne.

LA FLECHE. (*again peeking out*) Uh-oh. Could there be two?

HARPAGON. Marianne. Very nice. I meant...the dowry.

FROSINE. The dowry!? (*aside*) The dowry! How shall I parlay that!? (*to him*) A minimum of twelve thousand a year!

LA FLECHE. (*out again*) Thank God. It's not her.

HARPAGON. Twelve thousand a year!? In gold, of course?

FROSINE. Better than gold. Much better than gold.

HARPAGON. What's better than gold?

FROSINE. First of all, she was raised in a household where expenditures on food were minimal. A little salad, a bit of milk, a few apples, consequently you'll save a good two thousand per year on food. Plus she cooks brilliantly with whatever she's given, so you can fire your cook and save another two thousand a year. In addition, she has no interest whatsoever in the latest fashion, can get by with two old gowns—one for weekdays and one for Sundays. Detests jewels, thinks they're crass and ugly—another six thousand a year.

FROSINE. (*cont.*) She may need a few extra pairs of shoes, because she walks everywhere, and you won't need your carriage, what's that—fifteen hundred a year, driver, footmen, and the like? Let's see, what else? Hates the gaming tables, never goes, never plays, that'll save you a good thousand a year—you know how women these days are flocking to the casinos. It's

such a wonderful escape from our financial troubles. But she! She prefers to stay at home and....knit socks for her dear, darling husband. Do the math.

LA FLECHE. (*out again*) It's her. My master's true love.

HARPAGON. (*goes to his desk and scribbles, doing the math, while he talks*) One thousand, plus two, the jewels, the casino—carry the two...that's twelve thousand five hundred—you underestimated her!

FROSINE. So I did.

HARPAGON. You're right, Mme. Frosine. A poor girl is worth much more than a rich one. I'll take her!

FROSINE. I knew you would! Felicitations!

HARPAGON. Thank you.

FROSINE. I'll bring her over later with Señor Anselme and we'll have a jolly supper all together.

HARPAGON. A jolly supper? That's an awful lot of people to feed.

FROSINE. Well, she won't eat much! And you have such a beautiful garden from which to fill your table with all sorts of delicacies.

HARPAGON. THE GARDEN!? Oh, yes, the garden. Yes, I'll have my cook whip something up.

FROSINE. His last supper, eh?

HARPAGON. Oh yes, quite right. Won't need him any more! All right, bring the girl over, right away, so I can take a look at her.

FROSINE. Of course, monsieur. And I know the perfect marriage broker to draw up the papers. I'll send him over as well. We can get everything settled before the sun goes down.

HARPAGON. I like the way you work, Madame Frosine. No wasted time.

FROSINE. Exactly. Now, there's just one more thing...

HARPAGON. What's that?

FROSINE. A very small matter. (*She sits at his desk and scribbles a paper.*) My fee for brokering three marriages. I'm giving you a discount. Three for the price of two.

HARPAGON. Fee?

FROSINE. Yes, I said fee, not free.

HARPAGON. (*taking the paper and studying it as if it were infected*) Fee.

FROSINE. After all, monsieur, I'm a working woman, a widow who must fend for herself in the best way she can, and I can assure you, no one in town performs the service better than I. Besides, I find myself in temporary financial straits at the moment—who among us does not?—and so I'm asking only for the first half up front, the remainder to be paid when the marriage contracts are signed.

HARPAGON. Well, as it happens, I find myself a little short of funds as well—

FROSINE. Oh, when I think of how your fiancée longs to meet you face-to-face—

HARPAGON. Hard times have fallen upon all of us—

FROSINE. She can hardly wait for the wedding night—

HARPAGON. Rain! Do I hear rain!? (*He runs to the window.*)

FROSINE. Her sweet lips are already poised in a delicious pout, ready to kiss you—

HARPAGON. A heavy rain could wash things away—

FROSINE. All right. For you, I'll take a third up front—

HARPAGON. (*rushing out of the room*) Dinner! We'll settle everything at dinner!

FROSINE. (*to the audience*) Dinner my arse!

(*LA FLECHE appears from his hiding place.*)

LA FLECHE. I could have warned you—

FROSINE. You didn't have to. His reputation precedes him.

LA FLECHE. Don't hold your breath, waiting for your money.

FROSINE. Well, what shall I do!? I have to make a living somehow, and three brokered marriages would keep me going for months! Surely he has some money around here.

LA FLECHE. Oh, trust me, he does. And I'm going to find it. I've already narrowed down the playing field.

FROSINE. And when you do find it...

LA FLECHE. I'll make sure everybody gets their fair share, don't you worry. Your mother brokered my parents' marriage, and it was a very happy one.

FROSINE. A happy marriage! Well at least a few of them work out!

LA FLECHE. What makes you think that old goat's marriage will be happy?

FROSINE. How much longer could he live? She'll end up a rich young widow. Then she'll be happy.

LA FLECHE. Are you absolutely positive she wants to marry him?

FROSINE. Of course she doesn't! She's met some handsome young thing with no money, she doesn't even know his name but ping! They're in love, capital L, but she has to marry this—this—poor excuse for a human being because she has to look out for her—

BOTH. —Poor, frail, invalid mother.

FROSINE. Life can be so cruel.

(Enter MAITRE JACQUES, very dejected, with a piece of paper.)

LA FLECHE. Jacques! What are you doing out of the kitchen? Why aren't you making ze famous vegetable zoup?

MAITRE JACQUES. S'il vous plait, La Fleche, do not joke. I am too sad. I 'ate zees job.

FROSINE. Poor fellow. What's the problem?

MAITRE JACQUES. Ze boss, 'e send me out to deliver a message. 'e forget I am ze maitre. A chef extraordinaire. 'e force me to me make ze vegetable zoup every day. I am seek of eet! Zen 'e insult me by making me ze errand boy! And on ze way to and from zees errand, I pass le boucher, wiz ze beautiful, pink, plump sausages and pigs and chickens 'anging in ze window, zen le patisserie, wiz ze tartes, ze gateux, zen la boulangerie, wees

all ze herbes and spices, ze fruits, and leetle delicacies
all spread out for everyone—except me. Eet is sad.
Zees 'ouse ees sad. I am sad.

FROSINE. Suddenly I'm very hungry! Excuse me! (*She exits.*)

LA FLECHE. Now look, my man, you just have to learn to
stand up to him, like I do.

MAITRE JACQUES. Easy for you to say. 'e does not pay you.

LA FLECHE. Are you or are you not the greatest chef in all
of France?

MAITRE JACQUES. I am, but no one knows it but me.

LA FLECHE. Well, you have to make them know it. Make
him know it. Stand tall, proud, confident.

MAITRE JACQUES. Tall, proud confident...

(**HARPAGON** enters.)

HARPAGON. Ah, Jacques, good. You're back

MAITRE JACQUES. (*deflating*) 'ere is ze message from ze gen-
tilhomme you sent me to. (*He starts to slink off.*)

HARPAGON. Just a minute! Come back here, Jacques.

(*He does.* **LA FLECHE** pushes him forward.)

MAITRE JACQUES. *Maitre* Jacques, s'il vous plait. I am ze
chef.

HARPAGON. Yes, yes, my cook.

MAITRE JACQUES. (*with a nod to LA FLECHE*) Votre chef, mon-
sieur.

HARPAGON. All right, ze chef. You're going to prepare a
dinner tonight.

LA FLECHE. (*aside to MAITRE JACQUES*) Told you it would
work!

MAITRE JACQUES. (*complete change of mood*) A dinner!? Enfin!
At last! I am going to prepare un grand dinner! Oh,
my 'eart, she weel burst with joie! Zere are cobwebs in
ze keetchen from lack of créativité, my 'ands tweetch
from not slicing, dicing, ricing, whipping, chipping,
flipping, gripping ze sauté pans, from not peeling,
congealing, kneeling, feeling ze dough plumping up
in ze bowls, my nose droops weeth sadness from not

smelling ze jelling of ze aspeec, my eyes weep, searching for the gloss of ze sauce, my mouth, my mouth is numb from not tasting ze markerel, ze pickerel, ze caramel, ze béchamel, ze chanterelle weeth just a soupçon of muscatel, oh merci, monsieur, I weel prepare for you un dinner sublime!

HARPAGON. (*aside*) I have to get rid of him.

MAITRE JACQUES. ‘Ow many peoples?

HARPAGON. Let me see...eight, I think. Maybe ten

MAITRE JACQUES. Dix! Dix peoples! A banquet!

HARPAGON. Hold on now. We don’t need a banquet, the king isn’t coming. We can’t afford meals like that—and make sure you cook for eight. Food for eight will feed ten. These are hard times.

MAITRE JACQUES. ‘Ard times, oui, I ‘ave ‘heard about zees ‘ard times many times in zees ‘ouse. What you want me to prepare zees time? Ze same old vegetable zoup?

HARPAGON. Yes, but I suppose they’ll want something more filling as well. Potatoes.

MAITRE JACQUES. Ah, ze pommes de terre, jardinière, weez camembert? Or chauffés, gratinés, sautés, flambés, soufflés, machés, purées, weez a delicate bouquet of cabernet? Oh, monsieur, I know my métier! I go deeg up ze potatoes right away!

HARPAGON. No! I’ll deeg up—get the potatoes and bring them to you. Just keep it simple, no fancy sauces, meats, butter—

MAITRE JACQUES. Oh monsieur, you must ‘ave butter!

HARPAGON. Oh, all right, a little butter.

MAITRE JACQUES. A leetle butter, oui! You weel see, Maitre Jacques weel make ze best, most delicious dinner of your life! (*to LA FLECHE*) You were right!

(*He exits, singing jubilantly.*)

“Cooking is beauty, beauty is cooking, zat’s all you know on earth, and all you need to know...”

HARPAGON. He’s a madman. To get such pleasure from work! I don’t understand the human race.

LA FLECHE. Perhaps because you're not a member of it.

(HARPAGON tries to hit LA FLECHE with his cane, but LA FLECHE dodges him and exits. HARPAGON takes out the paper MAITRE JACQUES gave to him.)

HARPAGON. Can't let that good-for-nothing distract me from my business. And look at this! This foreign money-lender already has a borrower for me! Of course, he is foreign. Can't trust foreigners. But he did come highly recommended. Have to risk it. Well, now, to the children. *(He goes to the wings and calls.)* Elise! Cleante! Get down here at once! You too, Valere!

(ELISE and VALERE enter, disheveled, hair tousled. VALERE is wiping his mouth.)

What the devil have you two been up to?

ELISE. Cleaning, father.

VALERE. Tidying up.

ELISE & VALERE. The house.

HARPAGON. Well, tidy up yourselves, I have news. And where is your brother?

ELISE. He should be back shortly. He went on...an errand.

HARPAGON. Never here when I want him, always around when I don't.

ELISE. We both try to do whatever you desire, father.

VALERE. Both of your children seem to be devoted to you, monsieur, at least that is what I have been able to observe in my short time here.

HARPAGON. Well, I'm glad to hear that, because there's something I desire them to do.

ELISE. Of course.

HARPAGON. Good. I want you to get married!

(ELISE and VALERE look at each other, hardly daring to hope.)

ELISE. Married!

HARPAGON. Yes, married. You're of age, why shouldn't you? Well, Valère, shouldn't she marry?

VALERE. I see...no reason why not, depending upon the choice of the...uh...spouse.

HARPAGON. Exactly. And I've found one.

VALERE & ELISE. Oh?

HARPAGON. Practically under our noses!

ELISE & VALERE. (*ever more hopeful*) Really!?

HARPAGON. You'll have to admit, finally, that you have a very clever father. Smart and sensible in all things.

ELISE. I've always thought so, father.

VALERE. Yes, she's told me that many times.

HARPAGON. He's the perfect husband for you. Well, a bit older...

ELISE. A bit?

VALERE. How much of a bit?

HARPAGON. A mere thirty-five years.

ELISE. Wh—who—who—!!

HARPAGON. What's the matter with you? You sound like a pigeon!

ELISE. I thought—at least I was hoping—

VALERE (*interrupting*) And what is the name of this fifty-five-year-old gentleman, if we may ask?

HARPAGON. Señor Anselme.

ELISE. Who?

HARPAGON. Señor Anselme. He lives in the next block. He's seen you and he likes what he sees!

ELISE. But- but- but-I haven't seen him!

HARPAGON. You will.

ELISE. No, I don't think so.

HARPAGON. Why not?

ELISE. Because I'm going to be sick!

(*She sinks into a chair. VALERE tries to comfort her without HARPAGON seeing.*)

HARPAGON. Nonsense. You're as fit as I am.

ELISE. Father, I don't wish to marry.

HARPAGON. Daughter, I don't care. It's all being arranged and you're getting married. Tonight, if I can get a judge over here after the dinner. Frosine is sending a marriage broker over to draw up the contracts.

ELISE. No!

HARPAGON. No?

ELISE. No! I will not marry Señor ants-whatever-his-name-is.

HARPAGON. Oh yes you will! I'm your father and you do as I say!

ELISE. I'm your daughter and I won't! You can't make me!

HARPAGON. I beg to differ, but I can.

ELISE. I'd rather go into a convent!

HARPAGON. No convents! There's a huge entry fee!

ELISE. Then I'll take poison and die!

HARPAGON. You won't die. I won't hear of it. And you will marry him. Who ever heard of a daughter talking to her father like this!

ELISE. Who ever heard of a father forcing his daughter to marry like this!

HARPAGON. All fathers do it. Besides, it's a completely suitable match.

ELISE. It is not!

HARPAGON. Is!

ELISE. Not! *(She screams.)*

HARPAGON. Stop that, or I'll take the stick to you!

(He chases her around the room until he's worn out.)

When I catch you...

(He finally collapses in the ratty, uncomfortable chair.

VALERE takes **ELISE** aside.)

VALERE. You have to learn to play him! Stay calm.

ELISE. *(to VALERE)* Calm down!? Is that all you can say!? *(to HARPAGON)* Father, why don't you ask Valere? You value his opinion so much, why not ask him what he thinks about this marriage?

HARPAGON. And you'll abide by his decision?

ELISE. Yes. I will.

HARPAGON. All right. Valere, what do you think?

VALERE. You're giving a dinner?

HARPAGON. Yes. Why do you look so surprised?

VALERE. Oh, just that you've never given one, not since I've been here, at any rate. Not that the vegetable soup isn't delicious and filling...

HARPAGON. Well, I'm giving one tonight. And we're having potatoes too!

VALERE. How very generous. Who is coming?

ELISE. Valere! My father asked your opinion about the marriage. *(She keeps trying to interject a comment through the next exchange.)*

VALERE. Yes, of course. Well. I think—

HARPAGON. There's a great deal of preparation to be handled. I'm leaving all that to you, my trusted valet, Valere. I want you to serve the meal.

VALERE. I'll see to everything. But, you know, monsieur, I have only one uniform and it has a huge stain on the front...

HARPAGON. Stand like this, with your hat like this, to hide it.

VALERE. Yes, a brilliant idea. Now, there's just the problem of my breeches. There are holes on both sides. What do we do about that?

ELISE. *(completely out of patience)* VALERE!

HARPAGON. *(to ELISE)* Stop interrupting. *(to VALERE)* Stand with your back to the buffet, I'll have that good-for-nothing La Fleche serve the platters which you will hand to him. Good God, do I have to do the thinking for everybody around here!?

VALERE. Well, monsieur, it's just that no one has a keener mind, a quicker wit, a sharper tongue—

HARPAGON. What!?

VALERE. A sharper tongue for cutting through the bull... dogging problems of life and finding perfect solutions.

HARPAGON. Yes, that's true. So I take it you approve of my marriage plan for Elise?

VALERE. She is... a girl to be married without further delay.

HARPAGON. Hah! You hear that!? Tonight!

VALERE. Although, if I may suggest, monsieur, a girl gets married only once in her life, and perhaps she might need a little time to prepare, find a wedding dress, fix her hair—

ELISE. Exactly! I need time!

HARPAGON. Why should she do all that!? Needless expense.

VALERE. True. But then there's the marriage night. Her mother is not here to explain to her the...intricacies of the marriage bed.

HARPAGON. Bah. Nothing to it. Anselme will show her everything.

(ELISE faints. VALERE revives her.)

VALERE. She's overwhelmed with joy at the thought.

HARPAGON. She should be. When he dies, she'll inherit everything. He lost his family several years ago, and he has no living relatives.

VALERE. Wonderful. But perhaps he might not want to rush into things.

HARPAGON. He's as eager as a young buck in heat. And he'll take her without a dowry.

VALERE. Oh well, without a dowry, that's something. However, I've heard it said that one should give a little consideration to the feelings of the young lady in question—

HARPAGON. Without a dowry...

VALERE. Ah, truly an incontestable argument. Of course the age difference could make for problems—

HARPAGON. No dowry!

VALERE. *(starting to lose it)* It's the determining factor. No doubt about it. Yet, I can't help thinking how many fathers there are out there who are more concerned

with their daughters' happiness than with the amount of money they're going to get when they **BARTER HER IN TRADE!** Fathers who wouldn't ever think of sacrificing their daughters at the altar of greed, fathers who strive for marriages well-suited to both parties, where peace and harmony co-exist—

HARPAGON. HE DOESN'T WANT A DOWRY!

VALERE. (*barely holding it together*) Well, what can one say? Without a dowry says it all.

HARPAGON. (*to ELISE*) There, you see? Valere agrees with me. There's no more to be said.

(*A dog barks.*)

What's that! There's a dog in the garden! That damned neighbor's nuisance of a cur! **GET OUT OF THERE! STAY AWAY FROM MY GOLD—POTATOES!** (*to them*) Gold potatoes. It's a new strain from Ireland. Very hardy.

(*He exits into the garden. VALERE throws a fit, punches a pillow on the shabby sofa.*)

VALERE. Was there ever such a man!?

ELISE. That's the way you defend me!? You practically threw me on to the altar!

VALERE. What could I do!? I had to placate him! Resistance toward someone like that merely aggravates his natural, ingrained, miserable, narrow-minded **INFLEXIBILITY!** (*calming himself down*) So, no matter what I say, you must remember that I want only your happiness and mine.

ELISE. But this marriage!

VALERE. We'll find a way to stop it.

ELISE. We don't have a whole lot of time...

VALERE. You'll get sick.

ELISE. I AM sick!

VALERE. No, you'll pretend a grave illness. We'll paint your face gray or something.

ELISE. He'll call a doctor.

VALERE. Are you kidding? That would cost him money!

ELISE. Good point.

HARPAGON. (*re-entering, with the potatoes*) Damn dog. (*He counts the potatoes.*) Let me see—six potatoes for ten people. That's more than half a potato per person!

VALERE. (*to ELISE*) As I was saying, young lady, a daughter has to cater to her father's wishes, no matter what they are. The husband's age is of no importance, his looks are a mere trifle. When a girl finds a husband willing to take her without a dowry, she must accept and obey.

HARPAGON. Very nicely put, my lad.

VALERE. Oh, pardon me, monsieur, I should not have spoken to her out of turn.

HARPAGON. Nonsense. I give you leave to speak to her, instruct her, keep her in tow, in fact, you are now in charge of my daughter. And you, young lady, will obey his every command.

VALERE. Did you hear that, Elise? My word is law.

ELISE. Yes, sir.

VALERE. Monsieur, I shall follow her constantly, and continue to advise her on this very subject of marriage until she sees the wisdom of it.

HARPAGON. Good man, good man. Have to go give these to the cook. (*He exits.*)

VALERE. And I have to prepare for our banquet. And you must follow me everywhere!

(*They exit, VALERE chasing ELISE. Enter CLEANTE and LA FLECHE.*)

CLEANTE. (*looking around*) Good, father's not around. Now, tell me everything.

LA FLECHE. I found a money-lender for you.

CLEANTE. I knew you would! Oh joy, oh rapture! Because, you know, the situation has grown much more urgent. I have seen Marianne— (*bursting into song again*) Marianne, Marianne, oh my dear Marianne—

LA FLECHE. (*slapping him*) Stay on target.

CLEANTE. Oh, right. Well, her mother has arranged a marriage for her!

LA FLECHE. No! What a surprise!

CLEANTE. Yes! Through Frosine, that dreadful marriage broker!

LA FLECHE. (*aside*) I can't tell him myself. It's too...heart-breaking.

CLEANTE. And I have to get her over here so I can prove that I'm the better choice, and then she can go and tell her poor, frail, invalid mother that she's met someone better. I've ordered some furniture and things to be delivered and I have to pay for them when they get here!

LA FLECHE. Not to worry. The broker I found is going to arrange a loan for you.

CLEANTE. La Fleche, you are a treasure! Remind me to give you a raise, if I ever have enough money to do it.

LA FLECHE. Thank you, master.

CLEANTE. Now, who is this broker?

LA FLECHE. (*pulling a legal document from a pocket*) He has an excellent reputation. He made contact with a wealthy man willing to lend you enough money to make a lasting impression on Marianne, her poor, frail, invalid mother and the whole neighborhood.

CLEANTE. Oh! I knew a positive attitude would hold me in good stead. Can you get the full fifteen thousand!?

LA FLECHE. Yes, and at only five percent interest.

CLEANTE. Five percent!? Who's the lender?

LA FLECHE. He wouldn't say yet. We'll find out soon enough. But, there's one little glitch.

CLEANTE. A glitch? What kind of glitch?

LA FLECHE. It's a clause in the contract. In very small print.

CLEANTE. A clause? What does it say?

LA FLECHE. It says— (*He whips out a huge magnifier and reads slowly.*) Now, therefore, whereas the party of the second

part *non corpus mentalia*, which shall without the necessity of *coram vobis*, be constituted for the party of the first part, hereinafter to indemnify at thirty-five percent, be a *tort feaser* and without the requisite notice be declared to be in default, resisting the replevin of chattels a fortiori, and immediate *habeas corpus*.

CLEANTE. Uh-huh. What does that mean?

LA FLECHE. I have no idea. But I didn't like the sound of that thirty-five percent.

CLEANTE. Oh, I'm in despair! I can't trust a loan document I can't read. Do you know any lawyers?

LA FLECHE. Alas, no. I've tried to avoid them most of my life.

CLEANTE. La Fleche, you *have* to find the cashbox. We need the backup. The money lender might turn me down! You have to hide and watch my father and figure out where it is and get it without him seeing you, and before tonight!

LA FLECHE. No problem! (*aside*) WHAT!!?? I know approximately where it is, but how to get it without him seeing me...?

(*the voice of HARPAGON from offstage*)

CLEANTE. Here he comes! Go hide! Now!

(*Once again LA FLECHE goes behind the screen.*

HARPAGON *enters.*)

HARPAGON. There you are, you worthless ninny! Where have you been?

CLEANTE. Nowhere in particular. Out for some exercise. You're always telling me to walk, so I went for a walk.

HARPAGON. Good. Looks like you're in a mood to be obedient.

CLEANTE. Obedient?

HARPAGON. That's right. I want to talk to you about...marriage.

CLEANTE. Marriage! What a wonderful topic!

HARPAGON. Good. For once we think alike.

CLEANTE. Oh yes, father, we do.

HARPAGON. Now, it so happens there's a young lady who recently moved into the neighborhood. On this street, in fact. Her name is...uh...something with an M...

CLEANTE. Marianne?

HARPAGON. Oh, you know her.

CLEANTE. Oh yes, I've met her, in fact!

HARPAGON. (*aside*) Good. Now I can find out if Frosine was exaggerating or not. (*to him*) Well, what's your opinion? What do you think of her?

CLEANTE. She's magnificent! Delightful.

HARPAGON. What's she look like?

CLEANTE. Beautiful. No, beyond beautiful. She has the sparkle of a waterfall with the afternoon sun thrown upon it, the whimsy of a butterfly flitting across a meadow of asphodels, the serenity of a mountain lake at dusk—

HARPAGON. Oh shut up! What about her behavior? Her demeanor?

CLEANTE. Perfect. No question about it. Modest, respectful, yet with a *je ne sais quoi*—a fire in her, or a light, something intangible yet very palpable, that suggests spring bursting forth anew.

HARPAGON. (*aside*) How did I spawn this creature? (*to him*) So you think a girl like that should be taken seriously.

CLEANTE. Very seriously.

HARPAGON. And she would be an advantageous match?

CLEANTE. The most advantageous match any man could make!

HARPAGON. What about as a good house-keeper? Cooking, sewing, cleaning...

CLEANTE. She is unsurpassed.

HARPAGON. And whomever she married could consider himself a lucky man?

CLEANTE. (*over the moon*) The luckiest man alive!

HARPAGON. She's not rich, you know.

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