

# THE TIGHTWAD

By Edith Weiss

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## THE TIGHTWAD

*Adapted from Moliere's "The Miser"*

**By Edith Weiss**

**SYNOPSIS:** Harpagon loves money and where there is money, there is Harpagon. There is also trouble. Harpagon, a wealthy and avaricious widower, wants to marry Marianne, but Marianne loves Harpagon's son, Cleante, and sometimes, the heart wants what it wants. The entanglements continue. Harpagon intends to marry his daughter Elise off to an old and wealthy widower, Signor Anselm, but Elise is in love with Valere, a young man of noble birth who is a steward in Harpagon's household. Hidden identities, banned love, and a stolen money box soon cause a conflagration of laugh out loud comedy and knockout fun. Will young love win out? Maybe. Will the love of family show Harpagon that money is not the most important thing? No. It's Moliere, not Oprah.

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(3 females, 5 males, 3 either, doubling possible)*

ELISE (f).....	Harpagon's daughter, pretty, romantic, emotional. (79 lines)
VALERE (m).....	An earnest, open hearted young man. In love with Elise. Pretending to be a servant to be near her. (86 lines)
CLEANTE (m).....	A young, entitled, rather whiny young man. Harpagon's son. Madly in love with Marianne. (104 lines)
FLETCH (m).....	Cleante's valet. A street wise, smart ass, explosive young man. (63 lines)
HARPAGON (m).....	He is the tightwad, the miser. An old man, a widower, who loves nothing more than money. (237 lines)

- SIMON/SIMONE (f/m) ..... A money broker. Proper and professional. (5 lines)
- FROSINE (f) ..... A matchmaker. A woman alone, knowing and somewhat bitter. Will do whatever is necessary to survive. (64 lines)
- JACQUES/JACQUELINE (f/m) ..... Harpagon's valet, also his coachman and cook. Kind, competent, loyal to a fault. Has real affection for Harpagon. (62 lines)
- MARIANNE (f) ..... A young, kind, dutiful young woman engaged to Harpagon and in love with his son. (27 lines)
- SIGNOR ANSELM (m) ..... The older man who is to marry Elise. (18 lines)
- OFFICER (f/m) ..... By the book, but easily overpowered. (25 lines)

**DURATION:** 75-80 minutes

**DOUBLING OPTIONS:** *If played by a male, the parts of SIMON and ANSELM can be doubled. If doubling SIMON and the OFFICER, these roles can be male or female.*

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** I have emphasized the lack of control women had over their own lives, and also the class war. In this adaptation, Fletch, Cleante's valet, speaks street, and Cleante is written more fool than he is in Moliere's version.

**PROP LIST**

- Beating stick
- List of loan items
- Spoon holder
- Frosine's satchel
- Broom
- Dust pan
- Dust rag
- Furniture polish or wax
- Serving tray
- Oranges
- Cream puffs
- Éclairs
- Silverware
- Handkerchiefs
- Bottle of champagne
- Ruby ring on necklace chain
- A galosh (optional)
- Bottle of wine
- Money box

**SETTING**

The sitting room of a large house. There are four entrances, either with doors or hallways leading off: Downstage left goes to the Elise's bedrooms, upstage left to Harpagon and Cleante's bedrooms, upstage center to the front door of the house, upstage right to the kitchen and dining room, and downstage right to the garden.

**TIME**

Way back in 1668, French playwright Moliere wrote the famous five-act farce, *The Miser*. Very soon after other versions began to appear, but none as recent as this 75-minute modern adaptation. This can be set in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as in Moliere's time, or it can also be played in any time where there is a distinction between poor and rich, and where women don't have a lot of say in their lives.

**AT RISE:** *ELISE enters stage left followed by VALERE.*

**ELISE:** Oh, Valere, I've never been happier.

**VALERE:** Thank you for saying yes. You've made me so happy.

**ELISE:** You've made me so happy! Oh! Oh. *(She sighs, she sobs.)*

**VALERE:** Dearest changeable Elise, what is it? Sighing? Crying?

**ELISE:** Oh, Valere!

**VALERE:** Yes? What?

**ELISE:** Oh, Valere, Valere, Valere.

**VALERE:** What, what, what, sweet Elise? Do you regret saying yes?

**ELISE:** No. Well, not really. I don't know! I'm like a weeping willow in a wild tornado and the winds of love are whipping my emotions every which way! I think: He loves me! But then I think: but does he love me true? How can I know? And then the breeze of reason comes- yes, he does love me.

**VALERE:** My poor wind whipped poppet!

**ELISE:** I love when you call me poppet.

**VALERE:** My precious little poppet. Thank goodness for the breeze of reason.

**ELISE:** And then there comes a cold and fierce wind on whose wings is the question "will he be faithful?"

**VALERE:** Yes, I love you and will be faithful always!

**ELISE:** And then my fear returns for another reason. What will my father think? From whom we must hide our feelings? Who we deceive under his own roof?

**VALERE:** We won't always have to de-

**ELISE:** It's thrilling, isn't it – deceiving someone? Had I known how this felt, I might have done it earlier.

**VALERE:** What do you mean, Elise?

**ELISE:** I'm speaking rhetorically, you silly! Oh, look at you! Oh, if only my father could see what I see. You, jumping into the waves to save me from drowning; you, lifting me out of the water and carrying me to land; you, a nobleman who is pretending to be of the lower class and getting a job as my father's servant and wearing those ridiculous clothes just so you can be close to me.

**VALERE:** Yes, I've done all that but don't let *that* impress you. Be impressed only by my unwavering love. If only I could find my parents; then your father could meet them and know that we are a noble family. I am waiting for news, and if I don't hear anything soon I'll have to leave and resume my search!

**ELISE:** No, don't leave. Stay, and try to win my father's trust.

**VALERE:** I'm trying. I bow and scrape and ingratiate myself to him. I flatter him and praise him ad nauseam. 'Good morning Master Harpagon! My Master looks younger and more handsome every day! My Master is the paragon of generosity!' He just eats it up.

**ELISE:** You do all that for me. You're awesome. You know what else you could do? Get in good with my brother- he could help us.

**VALERE:** Me? But – what about you, my pretty little love poppet? Cleante's your brother – surely you could use his brotherly love to get him to help us.

**ELISE:** Me? Oh. I guess I could try.

**VALERE:** (*Looking offstage.*) He's coming. I'll leave you alone with him. Get him on our side.

*Exit VALERE upstage right. Enter CLEANTE stage left.*

**ELISE:** Hello, Cleante.

**CLEANTE:** Are you alone, Elise?

**ELISE:** Yes.

**CLEANTE:** Good. I have to talk to you. I have such a secret that I am about to burst!

**ELISE:** What a coincidence! What is—

**CLEANTE:** It's huge. You can't tell anyone.

**ELISE:** Of course n—

**CLEANTE:** I am in love.

**ELISE:** You're in love?

**CLEANTE:** I'm in love! Head over heels. In love! Love—That flying buttress that keeps the human race airborne – Love. I am in love!

**ELISE:** That is won—

**CLEANTE:** I know what you're going to say. 'That is one outrageous statement! You're dependent on our father; don't do anything without his consent, he knows better than you.'

**ELISE:** No, I—

**CLEANTE:** All I hear is no! My love won't listen to your objections! I am all about YES!

**ELISE:** Cleante, calm down. Are you engaged to her?

**CLEANTE:** No. Not yet. But I will be and don't try to stop me!

**ELISE:** No, I wouldn't—

**CLEANTE:** Of course you wouldn't understand, Elise, because you're not in love.

**ELISE:** Listen, I've got—

**CLEANTE:** No more objections! She's amazing!

**ELISE:** (*Giving up on her own news.*) Who is she?

**CLEANTE:** Marianne. Marianne, Marianne! — the word the wind murmurs when it mumbles through the maples — Marianne! Her name is Marianne and she takes care of her sick mother. She's a saint!

**ELISE:** I've got new-

**CLEANTE:** New respect for me? You should. Because they're poor, Elise. Yes, I love a poor person. And how do you think it feels to not be able to help her because of the stingiest father ever known to man?

**ELISE:** Actually, I—

**CLEANTE:** Exactly! It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a rich man than a needle in a haystack!

**ELISE:** (*Puzzled.*) I don't think that's right -

**CLEANTE:** I know! Especially wrong — a man who won't share his riches with his children. Elise, I need your help. Find out how Father might feel about my love for Marianne. If he objects, I'll leave and take Marianne with me. I have Fletch looking everywhere to borrow money for me.

*Sounds of voices off upstage left.*

**ELISE:** I hear Father coming. Let's go to my room.

*Exit ELISE and CLEANTE downstage left. Enter FLETCH, running away from HARPAGON, who is flailing at him with a stick, upstage Left. Even though he doesn't actually get hit, FLETCH yells.*

**FLETCH:** OW! OH! HEY!

**HARPAGON:** Get out! Rogue! Rascal! Rapscaillon! Get out of my house you thief!

**FLETCH:** Stop, Master Harpagon! Stop it! *(Aside.)* That old man is crazy! He's trying to beat me for no reason!

**HARPAGON:** What are you saying?

**FLETCH:** That I haven't done anything!

**HARPAGON:** Liar! Now get out or I will beat you within an inch of your good for nothing life! Out!

**FLETCH:** But your son ordered me to wait for him here.

**HARPAGON:** Wait outside, you sneaky spy!

**FLETCH:** I am not a spy. I am your son's valet.

**HARPAGON:** Who's always nosing around to see what he can steal.

**FLETCH:** Steal? From you? How? Everything is under lock and key, and you barely sleep cause you're afraid to close your eyes.

**HARPAGON:** *(Aside.)* You see? He's been watching my every move. *(To FLETCH.)* And how would you know that if you haven't been spying on me! Have you been spreading rumors that I have money hidden away?

**FLETCH:** *Do you have money hidden away?*

**HARPAGON:** No! I don't have money hidden away. Get out, I told you to get out!

**FLETCH:** *(Begins to exit down stage right.)* I'm going.

**HARPAGON:** Wait! What's your hurry? Do you have something of mine hidden on your person?

**FLETCH:** What?

**HARPAGON:** 'What' he asks innocently. Empty your pockets.

**FLETCH:** They're empty.

**HARPAGON:** Only a guilty man would glare like that.

**FLETCH:** *(Turning his pants pockets inside out. They're empty.)* Or an innocent man wrongly accused!

**HARPAGON:** Other pockets. All pockets. Back pockets! *(FLETCH follows all commands.)* Vest pockets. Shirt pockets. Boots!

**FLETCH:** Boots?

**HARPAGON:** AHA! The booty is hidden in your boots. Off with the boots!

*FLETCH takes off his boots, shakes them upside down.*

**FLETCH:** See? Nothing in my boots. (*Aside.*) Do you see what greed will make a man do? He's all full of avariciousness. It's just sad.

**HARPAGON:** Who were you talking to?

**FLETCH:** My boot.

**HARPAGON:** Your boot? Who talks to his boot?

**FLETCH:** One who has been wrongly accused and has no other recourse but to make lamentations to his boot.

**HARPAGON:** I'm watching you, Fletcher. Now get out.

**FLETCH:** I'm going. And just so you know: I'm watching you back.

**HARPAGON:** OUT!

*Exit FLETCH down stage right.*

Watching me back. A servant watching his master. It's not right! He's untrustworthy and impudent. It's so hard having a lot of money. How do you hide it? You could have a safe, but then everyone would know where the money is. In the safe, of course. Making the safe completely unsafe!

*Enter ELISE and CLEANTE, unnoticed, down stage left.*

Could he know I've hidden half a million dollars in the garden? (*He sees ELISE and CLEANTE.*) AHHHH! There they are. Did they hear me? Because I think I was talking out loud. I'm under so much stress! Cleante! Elise! Have you been there long?

**ELISE:** No, Father, we just got here.

**HARPAGON:** Just now? You heard nothing?

**CLEANTE:** Heard what, Father?

**HARPAGON:** Nothing. Nothing to hear. Why do you ask?

**CLEANTE:** I didn't ask, you asked.

**HARPAGON:** I only ask because I was talking to myself about how scarce money is these days, and how anyone with half a million dollars is a very lucky man. Would to God I had that kind of money!

**ELISE:** Father, we need to ask you-

**HARPAGON:** If I had that kind of money, how good my life would be!

**CLEANTE:** (*Sarcastic.*) Really? You're not well off?

**ELISE:** Stop it, Cleante.

**HARPAGON:** No, I'm not well off! I've got nothing. What, you think I'm lying?

**ELISE:** Let's stay calm, please.

**HARPAGON:** She's right. Let's change the subject. (*He sees CLEANTE and ELISE pointing at each other, aside.*) Did you see that? Making signs to each other? Where have I gone wrong as a father? (*To CLEANTE and ELISE.*) What do those signs mean?

**ELISE:** We were deciding who should go first. We both have something to tell you.

**HARPAGON:** And I have something to tell you.

**CLEANTE:** We want to talk about marriage.

**HARPAGON:** What synchronicity! I want to talk about marriage too!

**CLEANTE:** Oh?

**HARPAGON:** Have either of you ever seen a girl named Marianne, who lives in the neighborhood?

**CLEANTE:** Yes!

**ELISE:** I've heard of her.

**HARPAGON:** What do you think of her, Cleante?

**CLEANTE:** She's everything a woman should be. She's charming, honest, intelligent, beautiful—

**HARPAGON:** So you think she would make a good wife?

**CLEANTE:** YES!

**HARPAGON:** There is one little problem. She's — poor.

**CLEANTE:** So? She's wonderful, remarkable, extraordinary, marvelous — so why does it matter if she doesn't have a lot of money?

**HARPAGON:** Exactly. There are other things to consider besides just money.

**ELISE:** Oh, Father, yes! There are other things to consider.

**HARPAGON:** Maybe she has property. I'm glad you agree with me, Cleante, for I am resolved. I'm going to marry Marianne.

**CLEANTE:** What? Wait — what?

**HARPAGON:** I'm going to marry Marianne. What's wrong with your face?

**CLEANTE:** I feel sick.

*Exit CLEANTE upstage right.*

**HARPAGON:** He's soft, that one. Soft and sickly. I'll marry him off to an old widow, I think that's all he could handle. And as for you, Elise, I'm giving you to Signor Anselm.

**ELISE:** Signor Anselm? Who's that?

**HARPAGON:** A wealthy man. Wise. Prudent. Mature.

**ELISE:** Mature? How mature?

**HARPAGON:** Not a day over fifty, sixty five. I don't know exactly.

**ELISE:** With all due respect, Father, I do not want to marry him.

**HARPAGON:** With all due respect, daughter, you will marry him.

**ELISE:** If you please, I don't want to.

**HARPAGON:** I don't please. I want you married.

**ELISE:** Allow me the liberty to disagree, Father. No!

**HARPAGON:** I won't grant you that liberty, Elise, you have no say in the matter. You will marry him this very evening.

**ELISE:** This evening? Today's evening?

**HARPAGON:** Yes.

**ELISE:** No! No I will not!

**HARPAGON:** What do you mean, no? How dare a daughter speak to her father that way? It's a very good match. None will say differently.

**ELISE:** Some would say differently! Very differently!

*Enter VALERE upstage right. He fluffs pillows on furniture.*

**HARPAGON:** Here is Valere. Why don't we let him be the judge of whether it be a good match or not?

**ELISE:** Yes, let's leave it up to him.

**HARPAGON:** And you'll agree to whatever he says?

**ELISE:** Yes, I will.

**HARPAGON:** Valere! Come here. We need you to decide who is right in a matter, she or I.

**VALERE:** You're right, Sir. There's no denying it.

**ELISE:** But you don't know what we're talking about!

**VALERE:** No, but your Father can't be wrong. He's the most reasonable man I've ever met.

**ELISE:** No man is right or reasonable all of the time. It could happen in this one instance that I'm right.

**VALERE:** Ah, but I don't see how. He's lived longer, has gone through much, raised you, and knows you. Therefore he knows what's best for you.

**HARPAGON:** Of course I do. I plan to marry her off this evening, but my normally compliant daughter defies me and says she won't! What do you say to that?

**VALERE:** What do I say?

**HARPAGON:** Yes. Is she not obligated to do as her father wishes?

**VALERE:** Whooooo! Wow.

**HARPAGON:** What?

**VALERE:** This evening?

**HARPAGON:** Indeed.

**VALERE:** I say that basically I think you're always right, but...on the other hand – she is your daughter, and she's smart, like you are – so how could she not be – so perhaps she's not entirely in the wrong.

**HARPAGON:** Signor Anselm is a noble gentleman. He has no children from his first marriage. He's very rich. Do you see her doing better? I mean, look at her.

**ELISE:** Why, thank you Father.

**VALERE:** Well, um – maybe the problem is that this is so sudden. Maybe she needs some time to – to get used to things, to figure things out.

**HARPAGON:** Listen: he will take her without a dowry. I don't have to give him one penny.

**VALERE:** Without a dowry?

**HARPAGON:** Yes. Thus we do this tonight, before he changes his mind.

**ELISE:** But Father-

**HARPAGON:** Without a dowry!

**VALERE:** Perhaps your daughter is just thinking that maybe her lifelong happiness or relentless unhappiness should be considered here, if just for a moment, before she enters into a "until death do you part" proposition.

**HARPAGON:** Without a dowry!

**VALERE:** Well of course that's important. Very important. Although other people might try to point out that if your daughter doesn't want to marry him – do I have that right, Elise? You don't want to marry him? At all?

**ELISE:** No, I don't. Not at all.

**VALERE:** So some people might say that this isn't the best way to start a life of wedded bliss.

**HARPAGON:** Without a dowry!

**VALERE:** Oh, you can't argue against that. I mean, some would try. They would say things like no good father would give his daughter, sell his daughter, really, to someone she doesn't want.

**HARPAGON:** Without-

**ELISE:** A dowry! We know.

**VALERE:** Without a dowry. That shuts my mouth right up. What else is there to say?

**ELISE:** There's got to be something!

*Sound of a barking dog off down stage right.*

**HARPAGON:** What's that? Barking in my garden? (*Aside.*) Someone could be trying to steal my money. Wait here, you two, I'll be back in a minute.

*Exit HARPAGON down stage right.*

**ELISE:** Valere, you said you love me true! What are you doing?

**VALERE:** I'm just playing along with him. If you oppose him, he'll just dig his heels in. If he thinks you're agreeing with him, then you can lead him where you want him to go.

**ELISE:** He wants to marry me off tonight. This very evening. We don't have a lot of leading him around time.

**VALERE:** We can always run away, Elise –

*Enter HARPAGON, down stage right VALERE sees him.*

Elise, I'm sorry, but a daughter has to obey her father. Especially when "without a dowry" is taken into consideration.

**HARPAGON:** Well said! Just so! I now give Valere full authority over you, and I expect you to do everything he tells you, you ungrateful child! Now go to your room!

**ELISE:** *(Voice of doom.)* Gladly, Father.

**HARPAGON:** Valere, go with her.

**VALERE:** Sir?

**HARPAGON:** I don't trust her. I think she might try something. Nail her windows shut.

**VALERE:** Go into her room with her? Alone with her?

**HARPAGON:** Yes! Just until you're sure she won't do anything rash. Then Jacques will need you in the kitchen.

*VALERE and ELISE exit down stage left, hiding their smiles.*

**HARPAGON:** I am lucky to have such a good steward. That's what you get for living a good life.

*Exit HARPAGON upstage left. Enter CLEANTE upstage right.*

**CLEANTE:** Fletch! Fletch where are you? I told him to wait here! Worst servant ever!

*FLETCH sticks his head out down stage right.*

**CLEANTE:** What are you doing in the garden? I told you to wait in the house.

**FLETCH:** Your father tried to beat me, and then threw me out of the house! I thought that dog out there was gonna kill me.

**CLEANTE:** All right, fine.

**FLETCH:** Fine? I said, "beat" and "kill". What is fine about that?

**CLEANTE:** Fletch, listen to me! This is catastrophic! My father is my rival in love. He wants to marry Marianne!

**FLETCH:** Oh, that's indecent! An old skinflint like that wanting to marry a young lady!

**CLEANTE:** Not just any young lady but my young lady! And we have to do something before he finds out she's mine. Did you find someone who would lend me money?

**FLETCH:** Yes! I went to see Mister Simon the money broker and found a lender if you agree to his terms.

**CLEANTE:** So who's the lender?

**FLETCH:** I was not made privy to that information.

**CLEANTE:** My problems are over!

**FLETCH:** (*Skeptical.*) Uh-huh. Here are some articles the lender needs for you to sign before we can move forward on this.

**CLEANTE:** (*ready to sign*) Fine.

**FLETCH:** Maybe you should hear what they say first. "The lender, being a philanthropic minded individual, will charge the borrower no more than six percent interest."

**CLEANTE:** Only six percent? That's wonderful.

**FLETCH:** Just wait. There's more. "Since the lender does not have the sum required, he is obliged to borrow it at the rate of twenty percent, which he shall in turn apply to the first borrower."

**CLEANTE:** Twenty percent on top of six percent? That's – um... twenty plus six... That's twenty six percent! That's so high!

**FLETCH:** Very high.

**CLEANTE:** But I have to have that money.

**FLETCH:** All right. There's more. "Of the fifteen thousand dollars requested, twelve thousand shall be lent in cash. The remaining three thousand dollars the borrower will take in the form of furniture, and other useful accoutrement."

**CLEANTE:** Accoutrement? Instead of money? What accoutrement?

**FLETCH:** Here it is - the accoutrement list. 'One four poster bed with coverlet of Belgian lace, one black walnut tea wagon on wheels, one ceramic jar filled to the top with buttons'-

**CLEANTE:** Why do I want a jar full of buttons?

**FLETCH:** There's more. 'A set of tapestries, richly stitched and showing big eyed kittens and dogs playing checkers, one child's potty training chair, made of the finest pine; a pair, consisting of left and right foot, of good stout galoshes with brass buckles, one spoon holder.'

**CLEANTE:** A spoon holder? Who needs a spoon holder? You hold a spoon or you put it down!

**FLETCH:** There's more. In addition: 'One set of ramekins, two seamstress mannequins, three cannikins, one crock pot, one tea cozy, one kettle, one buck basket, one knick knack case crafted with mahogany and etched glass from Gaul.'

**CLEANTE:** This is outrageous! Other than the kettle, I don't even know what any of that is!

**FLETCH:** Excuse me but there's more on the back. In addition: 'One inkpot.' Well, you know what that is.

**CLEANTE:** Yes, I know what an inkpot is.

**FLETCH:** And finally, 'The aforementioned above is worth at least five thousand dollars, but the lender will sell it to the borrower for one thousand dollars so that he make resell it at a great profit.'

**CLEANTE:** These are most likely the worst terms ever made for a loan.

**FLETCH:** They're terrible. I wouldn't do it.

**CLEANTE:** But he's got me backed into a corner like a loose nun in a seedy hotel. I have to have that money before my father marries my Marianne!

**FLETCH:** Whatever you say.

*They sit on settee upstage. They hear sound of SIMON off, knocking at upstage center door. "Master Harpagon!"*

**FLETCH:** That sounds like Mr. Simon.

**CLEANTE:** Here? Why?

**FLETCH:** Come on! In the kitchen!

*Exit FLETCH and CLEANTE upstage right. They keep the door cracked so they can hear and we can see their faces. Enter HARPAGON upstage left, goes to door upstage center, lets in SIMON.*

**HARPAGON:** I hope you've brought me good news.

**SIMON:** Very good news. I found a young man most desperate for money. He'll agree to anything.

*FLETCH realizes HARPAGON is CLEANTE'S lender.*

**HARPAGON:** Ah, I should have put my dead wife's chamber pot on the list! May she rest in peace. You're sure I run no risk with this loan? Do you know who the young man is?

**SIMON:** I only met with his servant, who says the young man's father is very rich, and will be dead before eight months is out.

**HARPAGON:** (*Takes list from SIMON.*) He must be desperate to agree to these terms. Twenty six percent!

**SIMON:** Master Harpagon, if I may use your facilities?

**HARPAGON:** Of course. Right this way. Ah, it feels good, to be able to help a young man out. Charity sits well on my soul, Master Simon.

*HARPAGON and SIMON off upstage left. CLEANTE and FLETCH ENTER upstage right.*

**CLEANTE:** Please don't tell me my father's the lender.

**FLETCH:** It sure looks like it. Sorry, didn't know. We should go before they come back.

**CLEANTE:** I should have known. Who else would regret not making his dead wife's chamber pot part of a loan?

**FLETCH:** Sounds like our Harpagon. Come on, let's leave.

**CLEANTE:** Damn it all! I'm back to where I started! Penniless and trying to get money from my father!

**FLETCH:** (*Pushing CLEANTE towards upstage center door.*) Okay, okay – You're getting really mad. Let's go—

*Enter SIMON and HARPAGON upstage left.*

**SIMON:** Fletch! What are you doing here?

**HARPAGON:** He lives here.

**SIMON:** And is this is the young man wanting a loan? How did you-

**HARPAGON:** What? CleanTE? Why are you borrowing money?

**CLEANTE:** My mother's chamber pot?!

**HARPAGON:** What about it?

**CLEANTE:** HOW COULD YOU?

**HARPAGON:** What is the matter with you?

**FLETCH:** He's boiling mad. Like he's a little teapot, see, and he got all bubbling mad inside.

**HARPAGON:** He must be mad. Agreeing to such usurious terms!

Cleante, have I taught you nothing?

**CLEANTE:** (*Furious.*) You have taught me, once again, what a parsimonious, tight-fingered, money grubbing man you are! Selling me ramekins, cannikins, and hannikins as part of a loan? Who does that?!

**HARPAGON:** Even worse – who would agree to such a loan?

**FLETCH:** And on that note, Mister Simon, I believe we should leave them to their negotiations.

*Exit FLETCH and SIMON, running, upstage center. CLEANTE tries to suppress his fury.*

**CLEANTE:** You dare to offer a loan like that and call it charity?

**HARPAGON:** I'll be dead in 8 months, will I, you ungrateful profligate? I will live to be 100 just out of spite! You bamboozler! Get out!

**CLEANTE:** Who is the greater criminal, the man who buys money because he needs it, or the man who steals from the ones who need it? You get out, you felonious father!

**HARPAGON:** You dare to speak to me like that in my house? Get out of my sight you easily swindled son!

**CLEANTE:** I will get out, but only because I don't want to see such a swindler of a father!

**HARPAGON:** I don't want to see you more than you don't want to see me!

**CLEANTE:** The sight of you makes me sick!

**HARPAGON:** I am nauseated knowing you are my progeny!

**CLEANTE:** I loathe the sight of you so much I'm getting out first!

*Moves to upstage left.*

**HARPAGON:** Oh no, you're not! My revulsion gives me wings!

*They run off upstage left. They get out of the door at the same time. They could even get stuck in the door. Enter FLETCH, with FROSINE upstage center.*

**FROSINE:** That man almost knocked me down at the front door!

**FLETCH:** That was Mr. Simon, a business associate. He had an urgent appointment elsewhere. You're here to see Master Harpagon, I presume, about the matchmaking?

**FROSINE:** Yes. I found a sweet young thing for him and now arrangements must be made.

**FLETCH:** And you expect to be paid.

**FROSINE:** Of course.

**FLETCH:** He's not gonna pay you, Frosine. You don't know who you're dealing with. Where most people have a heart, he's got a thumping money box. He loves money more than anything. More than his reputation, more than his dead wife, more than his living kids! You might as well go home right now.

**FROSINE:** I mean to get paid. And I know how to manipulate a man with sweet talk.

**FLETCH:** All right. But here he comes, you'll find out for yourself soon enough.

*Exit FLETCH upstage right. FROSINE moves upstage and checks out items on small table next to the settee. Enter HARPAGON upstage left, ripping the loan list into pieces. He is downstage of her and doesn't see her.*

**FROSINE:** Don't move!

**HARPAGON:** Take my life, because I will not give you my money!

**FROSINE:** No, Master Harpagon, I'm not robbing you.

**HARPAGON:** Ah, it's you, Frosine.

**FROSINE:** I don't want you to move because right there, in that light, it shows how chiseled your cheekbones are. How firm your jaw. Put your hands up.

**HARPAGON:** If you're not robbing me, why should my hands be up?

**FROSINE:** I want to see your biceps ripple.

*HARPAGON puts his arms up, tightening his biceps.*

Oh yes! The musculature of a 25 year old!

**HARPAGON:** I'm sixty five years old.

**FROSINE:** No! So robust, so vigorous! You're only just in your prime; you'll live past 100!

**HARPAGON:** I was just saying that to my son. So! How goes our little bit of business?

**FROSINE:** Excellent. I told Marianne's mother that you had seen her pass by on the street and wanted her for a wife.

**HARPAGON:** And...?

**FROSINE:** She said yes. You can marry Marianne this evening.

**HARPAGON:** Now tell me about the money that comes with Marianne.

**FROSINE:** You do understand that they are poor.

**HARPAGON:** That's no excuse. Isn't there some family heirloom she could sell?

**FROSINE:** I'm afraid not.

**HARPAGON:** The mother's ill, correct?

**FROSINE:** Yes.

**HARPAGON:** Well, doesn't she have some medicine she could sell on the street?

**FROSINE:** If she doesn't take her medicine, she'll die.

**HARPAGON:** Be that as it may, no one marries a girl unless she brings something with her.

**FROSINE:** She brings you twelve thousand dollars a year.

**HARPAGON:** Twelve thousand? How so?

**FROSINE:** As she's been brought up poor, you don't need to give her delicacies or dessert. She can live on porridge and potatoes. There's three thousand a year saved. And if you keep her servings small, she'll stay the same size and not need new clothes. Since she's always been poor, she won't expect jewelry, entertainment, or vacations.

**HARPAGON:** Saving me money is not the same as having money I can hold in my hands.

**FROSINE:** She's 19. You'll have plenty to hold in your hands. Plus, they have some property in a foreign land. It'll be yours.

**HARPAGON:** There is something else that bothers me.

**FROSINE:** What? That she can't spin gold out of straw?

**HARPAGON:** She is so young. I'm a little bit afraid she'll think I'm too old for her, no matter how good my musculature is.

**FROSINE:** Relax! She has no desire for young men. What she likes are knee shawls, canes, and spectacles. For her that signifies the maturity and wisdom of a man who, like a side of beef at the butcher's, is well hung and aged.

**HARPAGON:** Knee shawls, canes and spectacles! That is almost too good to be true! You know, I've often thought, if I were a young woman, I would want an old man.

**FROSINE:** Absolutely, me as well. What are young men but good looking idiots? They're like wild steeds, stallions that rage and run and pound the ground in a frenzy of passion, making the bushes tremble. Who needs that?

**HARPAGON:** Has Marianne noticed me when I pass her on the street?

**FROSINE:** No. But I have praised you to the skies, and have emphasized the advantages a marriage with you would bring.

**HARPAGON:** Very good, Frosine.

**FROSINE:** You're so understanding, and kind – I wonder if I might ask a favor? If you could advance me some money-

**HARPAGON:** *(Starts to Exit upstage left.)* Excuse me, I'm very busy.

**FROSINE:** Oh, stay! What a manly figure you cut from behind.

**HARPAGON:** Oh, you flatterer! It's not as if I were some young buck!

**FROSINE:** You are much better than a young buck. And a few bucks would really help me out.

**HARPAGON:** I must go.

**FROSINE:** But you owe me-

**HARPAGON:** Do you hear that? Someone's calling me.

**FROSINE:** No, they're not.

**HARPAGON:** Good bye.

*HARPAGON exit upstage left.*

**FROSINE:** Bastard! I will get my money one way or the other. *(FROSINE goes to upstage center door, picks up a trinket from the table and puts it in her bosom.)* A spoon holder. I've always wanted one.

*Exit FROSINE upstage center. ENTER VALERE downstage left, looking disheveled. He moves toward kitchen but first enter JACQUES and FLETCH, upstage right. FLETCH is in serving clothes.*

**JACQUES:** Where have you been, Valere?

**VALERE:** I had orders to – subdue Elise.

**JACQUES:** Subdue her? What, was she foaming at the mouth?

**VALERE:** No, Master Harpagon was afraid she wanted to do something rash or impetuous.

**FLETCH:** Like what?

**VALERE:** Like jumping out of the window, if you must know.

**FLETCH:** And did you overcome her desire?

**VALERE:** No. I mean yes. Yes I overcame her desire and no she did not jump out of the window.

**JACQUES:** I too have orders, direct from Master Harpagon himself, regarding the dinner with his bride tonight. (*Sees pieces of ripped list on the floor.*) Oh! Look at this mess! Fletch, clean it up! You are also to polish the furniture. Take care not to rub too hard, so as not to wear the wood out.

**FLETCH:** Do not rub the wood too hard. Oh, I've done that. How about you, Valere? You must've, seeing as how enthusiastically you performed your subduing duties.

**VALERE:** (*Straightening hair.*) An enthusiastic valet is a good valet.

**FLETCH:** Ah.

**JACQUES:** Fletch, you are also to see to the wine – and if any bottles are broken, or stolen, you will be responsible and it will be deducted from your wages.

**FLETCH:** Even if I don't steal the wine, I'm responsible? That's crazy!

**JACQUES:** You think that's crazy? To save money, I'm now both the cook and the coachman. There is a lack of decorum in this house.

**FLETCH:** A lack of decorum in this house? What about my pants? Look at this hole in the back of these pants. There's a lack of decorum in my pants.

**JACQUES:** There is no money for new uniform pants! Keep your backside to the wall, that's all. Now polish the furniture in the dining room!

*Exit FLETCH upstage right. Enter HARPAGON upstage left. He listens.*

Valere, you are to pour the wine. Do not pour willy-nilly and freely. Make them ask. Twice at least. And keep refilling the water glasses.

**HARPAGON:** Good man, Jacques!

**JACQUES:** Thank you Sir.

**HARPAGON:** Valere, how lies the land with my daughter?

**VALERE:** What? Oh! – her land is fine. It's lying there really well.

**HARPAGON:** How flustered you seem! But here she is! And my son.

*Enter ELISE downstage left and CLEANTE upstage left.*

Children, we're planning my wedding dinner. Prepare yourself, Elise – Elise, you look flushed. Do you have a fever?

**ELISE:** Fever? No.

**CLEANTE:** (*Hand on ELISE'S forehead.*) She is a little warm.

**ELISE:** Warm from the effort of trying to obey you, Father. I am - flushed with obedience.

**HARPAGON:** You're acting strangely today Elise. I don't like it.

**ELISE:** Sorry, Father.

**HARPAGON:** You are to take my fiancée Marianne to the Fair, and then join us for dinner. After which there will be not one but two weddings to celebrate!

*ELISE is staring lovingly at VALERE.*

Are you listening to me?

**ELISE:** Yes, Father.

**HARPAGON:** Cleante, you have behaved abominably today, and I found it in my heart to forgive you. So I will not have you glaring at my fiancée.

**CLEANTE:** Why would I glare, Father?

**HARPAGON:** Everyone knows how children feel about a stepmother.

So I'm warning you: after the borrowing money incident, you had better be on your best behavior and give my fiancée nothing but smiles and approving looks.

**CLEANTE:** I think I can do that, Father.

**HARPAGON:** Be off, the both of you.

*Exit CLEANTE upstage left and ELISE downstage left.*

**HARPAGON:** Jacques, I need to talk to you.

**JACQUES:** Will you be speaking to the cook or the coachman?

**HARPAGON:** To both.

**JACQUES:** Which first?

**HARPAGON:** How does it matter? You're both my cook and my coachman.

**JACQUES:** Which one would you like to speak to, please?

**HARPAGON:** The cook.

**JACQUES:** I'll get him.

*JACQUES Exits upstage right.*

**HARPAGON:** He is the cook. Why would he walk away?

**VALERE:** I don't know, Sir.

*Enter JACQUES, having taken off his coachman coat and in his in cook's shirt.*

**JACQUES:** The cook at your service, Sir.

**HARPAGON:** What sort of repast are you preparing for tonight?

**JACQUES:** That depends entirely on how much money you give me.

**HARPAGON:** Money? Why is it always about money? What about some creativity in the kitchen?

**VALERE:** You have the right of it Master. Anyone can set out a feast with unlimited money. It is the Master Chef who can do it for little money.

**JACQUES:** What do you know about cooking?

**HARPAGON:** I'll not have my servants arguing!

**JACQUES:** Very well. I was thinking a soup, two entrees, a roast beef and a quiche, a salad, side dishes, a dessert and a cheese and fruit plate.

*HARPAGON makes snorting, indignant sounds.*

**VALERE:** But of course Master is snorting! To serve so much food to people is to smother them with side dishes! Asphyxiate them with sauces! Kill them with quiche! As the ancient Greeks said, one should eat to live, not live to eat.

**JACQUES:** Which Greek was that?

**VALERE:** I believe that was - Pepe. Pepe the Greek. (*Pronounced as "Pepe Le Pew," the French cartoon skunk.*)

**JACQUES:** Pepe the Greek?

**VALERE:** Yes. Not as well known as Socrates, but as sapient and sage.

**JACQUES:** Sapient and sage. Perhaps I'll serve that as a side dish.

**HARPAGON:** Master Jacques, you are to report to Valere. He'll oversee that there is no extravagance. Oh, and- my coach needs to be cleaned.

**JACQUES:** Are you talking to the coachman now?

**HARPAGON:** I'm still talking to you.

**JACQUES:** One moment.

*JACQUES exits upstage right*

**HARPAGON:** What have I have done to deserve such insolence?

**VALERE:** I don't know, Sir. You give and give and this is what you get in return. It's tragic, really.

*Enter JACQUES.*

**JACQUES:** The coachman at your service, Sir.

**HARPAGON:** Clean the coach and get the horses ready to drive to the fair.

**JACQUES:** The horses, Master? The same horses you barely feed and are so thin that they don't actually resemble horses anymore? The horses who are more like horse ideas or horse shadows? Or maybe horse 'shades' as Pepe the Greek would say. Those horses?

**VALERE:** Jacques seems in a cranky mood today.

**JACQUES:** Valere seems in an ass-kissing mood every day.

**HARPAGON:** Peace, you two!

**JACQUES:** Master, I have been with you for many long years. If it were possible for you to have a friend, it would be me. This person has worked here a scant few weeks and flatters you shamelessly!

**HARPAGON:** I have not noticed being flattered.

**JACQUES:** Master, he meddles in the household and has cut back on the servant's food, the wine, the firewood, the candles, just to curry your favor! We are hungry, cold, and sitting in the dark! And you, Master, are the talk of the town!

**HARPAGON:** Really? In a good way?

**JACQUES:** No! It hurts me to hear what they say about you. Because in spite of everything, after the horses, you are the person I like the most.

**HARPAGON:** What do they say?

**JACQUES:** I can't say. You'll be mad.

**VALERE:** (*Whisper to JACQUES.*) Smart move.

**HARPAGON:** I won't be mad.

**VALERE:** (*Whisper.*) You know he will.

**HARPAGON:** I won't. I promise.

**VALERE:** (*Whisper.*) Don't do it.

**HARPAGON:** Look at me smiling! Just tell me.

**JACQUES:** All right. They say you are so tight fisted that your socks are holier than the pope. That you steal your horse's oats so you have something to feed your servants. That you would sell your very own chamber pot and piss out the window if you thought you could get away with it. They call you The Tightwad.

**HARPAGON:** (*Furious.*) How – How - how dare you?! (*Starts to beat him.*) You knave! You icon of insolence! You deacon of idiocy!

**JACQUES:** No! Oh! You asked me to! I knew you'd be mad!

**HARPAGON:** And yet you told me anyway! Let that be a lesson to you!

*Exit HARPAGON upstage left.*

**VALERE:** I'm sorry. I told you not to say anything.

**JACQUES:** Shut up, you puffed up self-important ignoramus! Go ahead, laugh at my beating, you'll get yours soon enough.

**VALERE:** I wasn't laughing! Please, we're on the same side-

**JACQUES:** You would favor me with your absence, (*puts up his fists*) or this will come to fisticuffs!

**VALERE:** Please, I'm sorry-

**JACQUES:** I WILL PUNCH YOUR BIG MOUTH!

**VALERE:** All right, I'm leaving.

*Exit VALERE upstage right.*

**JACQUES:** That beating was my fault, I should have known better. Never tell the truth to your boss! But that steward Valere – he needs to learn a lesson. I will get my revenge on him.

*Enter FROSINE and MARIANNE upstage center. FROSINE has a satchel that she leaves upstage.*

**FROSINE:** Jacques, is your master at home?

**JACQUES:** Oh yes. Probably resting, as he has recently taken some vigorous exercise.

**FROSINE:** Pray tell him we are here. Frosine and Marianne.

*Exit JACQUES upstage left.*

Vigorous exercise? Did I not tell you that his vigor belies his age?

**MARIANNE:** (*Sadly.*) Probably. You've said so many things.

**FROSINE:** What's wrong, Marianne?

**MARIANNE:** I don't want to be here. I feel like a chicken whose head is on a stump waiting to be chopped off.

**FROSINE:** Very unattractive imagery, Marianne. But I understand. If you wanted an agreeable death, Harpagon is not the stump you'd want to lay your head on.

**MARIANNE:** Frosine, there is someone else who has captured my heart.

**FROSINE:** Oh, no. That dandy who's been visiting you? You don't even know his name!

**MARIANNE:** It doesn't matter. I've fallen in love with him. I don't want anyone else. Especially not this old man.

**FROSINE:** May I speak frankly. Yes, he's old. But most of these young men are poor as church mice. As are you. Marry Harpagon, and although there are some disagreeable things about him, he'll feed you, so your sick mother won't have to. But best of all, he'll be dead soon. Then you go into mourning for awhile, and then choose any man you want because you'll be rich!

**MARIANNE:** It seems wrong to marry someone and then hope he dies as soon as possible.

**FROSINE:** He's going to marry you, and you have absolutely no say in the matter. So just how wrong can it be?

*Enter JACQUES and HARPAGON, upstage left, in spectacles, leaning on a cane, with a shawl covering his shoulders.*

**JACQUES:** Master Harpagon - Mistress Frosine and the maiden Marianne.

**HARPAGON:** Off with you now. Get the coach ready.

*Exit JACQUES downstage right.*

Excuse the spectacles, dear one; your beauty is radiant enough to be seen without them, but with them you rival the stars in the heavens so that your twinkle outshines the seraphim and would reduce my need for candles!

**MARIANNE:** *(Whisper.)* What is he talking about?

**FROSINE:** He's complimenting you.

**HARPAGON:** Did she speak?

**FROSINE:** She is speechless. And shy, you know how these young girls are.

*ENTER ELISE downstage left.*

**HARPAGON:** Of course. Ah, and here, a heavenly body from my own firmament come to greet you- this is my daughter Elise, but let me just say, Marianne, your beauty outshines hers by a factor of many constellations.

**ELISE:** Why, thank you Father.

**MARIANNE:** *(To FROSINE.)* What a truly awful man.

**HARPAGON:** What says the paragon of beauty?

**FROSINE:** She thinks you're wonderful. She loves the spectacles and the knee shawl, but the cane completely sealed the deal.

**HARPAGON:** Oh, sweet young orb! Soon we'll be sharing my knee shawl of an evening!

**MARIANNE:** *(Aside.)* I die by degrees. I am dead ere long.

*Enter CLEANTE upstage left.*

**HARPAGON:** And here is my son, Cleante.

**MARIANNE:** *(To FROSINE.)* Oh, I live! That's him! The man who's been visiting me!

**FROSINE:** Just my luck.

**HARPAGON:** I see that you are both astounded that I have such big children. But I will soon be rid of them!

**CLEANTE:** Madam, I only today heard of my father's intentions. It was such a surprise.

**MARIANNE:** I too was taken quite by surprise.

**CLEANTE:** My father could not have made a better choice, and seeing you is a joy; but I have something to say and I hope you'll take it as the compliment it's meant to be. I find it will be difficult if not repugnant for me to call you Stepmother. If it depended on me, this marriage would never happen.

**HARPAGON:** What sort of compliment is that?

**MARIANNE:** If you find it repugnant to have me as a stepmother, think how I feel having you as a stepson.

**HARPAGON:** She gives as good as she gets! Please forgive my son.

**MARIANNE:** There is nothing to forgive. I am delighted to hear his true feelings.

**HARPAGON:** His feelings are temporary. In time, he will have a change of heart.

**CLEANTE:** I beg Madam to believe my feelings will never change.

**HARPAGON:** I demand you stop speaking that way, Cleante.

**CLEANTE:** You're right, Father. Let me speak to Madam as though I were in my father's place. You are the most beautiful and true thing I've ever seen, and to be your husband would make my heart overflow with love each day; I would do anything to make you mine, nothing will stand in my way-

**FROSINE:** Whoa there, Bucky.

**HARPAGON:** Stop, Cleante, you're being ridiculous.

**CLEANTE:** I'm doing this for you, Father.

**FROSINE:** I have an idea – Elise, Marianne, let's go to the fair right now so you can get to know each other.

**HARPAGON:** (*Shouting off.*) Valere!

*Enter VALERE upstage right.*

Tell the coachman to hitch up the horses. And- did you order the refreshments like I asked you to?

**VALERE:** The refresh...? (*Whispering.*) You never asked me.

**HARPAGON:** You forgot!

**VALERE:** I forgot!

**HARPAGON:** My apologies, ladies, for not having refreshments here for you. I shall beat the steward later.

**CLEANTE:** Luckily, Father, I ordered some Chinese oranges, cream puffs, and eclairs. (*Yelling off.*) Fletch!

**HARPAGON:** (*Whispered aside to VALERE.*) Did you hear that? Do you know how expensive that is?

**VALERE:** He's out of his head.

*Enter FLETCH upstage right.*

**CLEANTE:** Please bring out the refreshments for our guests.

*Exit FLETCH, walking backwards, upstage right.*

**HARPAGON:** (*To VALERE.*) Tell Jacques to hurry up with those horses. (*Whispered.*) The faster they're out of here, the less food they'll eat.

**VALERE:** I fly.

*HARPAGON gasps. Enter FLETCH with a tray of food, upstage right. He stands upstage.*

**FROSINE:** Ah, the appetizers are here!

**FLETCH:** Please, everyone, help yourselves! *(Aside.)* Including me. That oatmeal they're serving us is disgusting!

**FROSINE:** I am starving! *(Aside.)* Like I said, I'll get paid one way or the other.

*FROSINE and FLETCH stuff themselves, FLETCH surreptitiously. FROSINE stuffs oranges down her bosom.*

**HARPAGON:** Now don't spoil your appetites for dinner, everyone.

**FROSINE:** Don't worry, Harpagon. My appetite is the stuff of legend. There's no spoiling it.

**ELISE:** I find myself suddenly ravenous. *(Starts eating.)*

*Everyone is stuffing their faces. Enter JACQUES downstage right.*

**HARPAGON:** Slow down, we don't want anyone choking!

**JACQUES:** Master, I need a word.

**HARPAGON:** Are the horses ready so we can get these people out of here before they eat all my food?

**JACQUES:** No. The horses pulled the carriage for nine steps and collapsed. They're dead.

**HARPAGON:** Oh damnation! Nothing goes right today. Tomorrow see if you can sell them for glue. I'll deal with the situation here.

*Exit JACQUES upstage right. HARPAGON crosses to FLETCH, holding the tray, and sniffs at food.*

**HARPAGON:** I'll try one of these – Oh—*(He turns his head away from the tray, the beginning of a sneeze.)* ahh- ahhh- AHHHHH—

*Everyone brings out a handkerchief, holds it out to him. Just before he sneezes, HARPAGON turns and sneezes on the food tray. Ad-libs of disgust from FLETCH, ELISE, FROSINE, CLEANTE.*

**FLETCH:** Some of that got on me! Oh damn, that is so gross.

**HARPAGON:** Oh, no! The appetizers are ruined. Such a pity. Fletch, take them back to the kitchen!

**FROSINE:** I'll do it, Fletch. So you can tidy up.

*FROSINE EXITS upstage right. FLETCH picks up any plates etc. and EXITS with them upstage right.*

**HARPAGON:** *(Takes VALERE aside.)* Valere, come here. Dry everything off and we'll return it to the vendor.

**VALERE:** *(Trying to work through his disgust.)* Oh— oh- okay.

*Exit VALERE upstage right.*

**HARPAGON:** *(To audience.)* Do you see how they're glaring at me? What is wrong with people? Graciousness – manners – these are things of the past, apparently. Well, I've got to make sure Valere dries the snot off the food so I can get my money back. Cleante, why don't you show our guests the garden?

**CLEANTE:** Grand idea, Father. I've taken the liberty of having Fletch set up bottles of wine there.

**FROSINE:** *(Entering upstage right.)* Look Master Harpagon I found champagne for toasting the happy couples!

*Exit CLEANTE, FROSINE, MARIANNE, and ELISE downstage right.*

**HARPAGON:** My wine! My champagne! They just take it! Taking such liberty with my things! That is why equality and liberty for all is a very bad idea. I may need to lie down.

*Exit HARPAGON upstage left. Enter CLEANTE, ELISE, MARIANNE, FROSINE downstage right.*

**CLEANTE:** We're alone. We can speak freely.

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