

The Miser of Dry Gulch
By Matt Buchanan
Based on the play *L'Avare* by Molière

Characters (in order of appearance)

Larry Appleton, a ranch manager with a secret
Elsie Richman, daughter of Old Man Richman
Clint Richman, son of Old Man Richman
Old Man Richman, a wealthy but miserly rancher
Fletcher, a ranch hand
Miss Verline, a professional matchmaker
Mary Ann Sweetbottom, a poor but pure neighbor
The Sheriff
U.S. Marshal Hanson

The yard outside Old Man RICHMAN's ranch house, sometime during the great push west.

Enter LARRY and ELSIE.

LARRY

Elsie, darlin', what's eatin' you? You look sad.

ELSIE

No, no.

LARRY

You can't kid me, honey. What is it? Are you havin' second thoughts?

ELSIE

Oh, no—not about you, Larry. I'm yours and I always will be. It's jest—

LARRY

What, honey?

ELSIE

Well, it's Pa, a'course.

LARRY

That miserly old skinflint! Sorry! I know he's your Pappy, and fer your sake I gotta love him—

ELSIE

No, no—I know what Pa is. Nobody knows better'n me. He's the richest man in all a' Dry Gulch, but do we ever see any 'a' his gold? Ha! He'd squeeze a nickel so hard the buffalo bellows. He ain't never gonna let me marry a poor man like you.

LARRY

But I keep telling you—I ain't really poor.

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ELSIE

Oh, I know that, my love. You don't gotta convince me. I know you're only workin' fer my Pa to be closer to me, and I love you fer it. But it's Pa you gotta convince.

LARRY

If I could only find my long-lost family, I'd show him who's good enough fer his daughter. But I can't bear to leave you.

ELSIE

Any other father, it would be enough that you saved me from that bucking bronc.

LARRY

That was the first time I set eyes on you. It was love at first sight, I guess.

ELSIE

If it wasn't fer you, I'd be dead—but I guess his money is more important.

LARRY

Greedy old goat.

ELSIE

You gotta to work at getting' on his good side.

LARRY

That there project's comin' along nicely. Y'see how I'm handlin' the old buzzard. Flattery, flattery flattery. I might personally think he's the greediest son of a skunk merchant who ever stepped in a prairie dog hole—sorry—but I tell him different. I'm always complimenting him. I always agree with him, even when he's wrong. Especially when he's wrong. Some fellers are suckers fer that sorta thing, and your Pa is one of 'em. There ain't no way I can overdo it. I can tell he's warmin' up to me. Lookit how he's made me manager 'a' the whole dang place already.

ELSIE

(Laughing.) Fletcher ain't none too happy about that. He thinks the job oughter be his.

LARRY

Well, Fletcher jest don't know how to handle the old grabber. He's too honest—he don't know how to flatter. He'll always be jest a ranch hand.

ELSIE

Maybe you should work on Clint, too. He might could help us.

LARRY

No—your brother and your father are so different there ain't no way I can please 'em both at the same time. But you might could work on him. Here he comes—why not have a talk with him?

LARRY exits as CLINT enters.

CLINT

Elsie! I'm glad you're alone—I gotta talk to you. I got a secret.

ELSIE

You have? Why, so have I! But you first.

LARRY looks around to be sure they are unobserved.

CLINT

(With a confidential smirk.) I'm in love!

ELSIE

In love!

CLINT

Now, before you say anything, I know that I depend on Pa fer everything, and it's my duty as a son to do what he says. I know he's older and wiser 'n me and I should always foller his advice. I know I shouldn't be getting' engaged unless he says so.

ELSIE

Engaged!

CLINT

I know all that, so you can save yourself the trouble 'a' saying it.

ELSIE

Well, really—am I likely to go and say any such thing? Am I such an unsympathetic sister?

CLINT

No, but you ain't in love. You don't know what it's like.

ELSIE

(Giggling.) Maybe it's time I told you my secret.

CLINT

She's all I think about.

ELSIE

So you're really engaged?

CLINT

Er—well, no, not yet. In fact, I've only spoke to her a couple times.

ELSIE

Who is she?

CLINT

Her name's Mary Ann. *(Sighing.)* Mary Ann! Ain't that the most beautiful name in all the world? *(Sighing.)* Mary Ann!

ELSIE

Yes, but who is she?

CLINT

She jest moved into that little cabin acrost the valley with her crippled mother. It's beautiful the way she takes care a' the poor woman. I wisht you could see her.

ELSIE

I don't need to—if you love her, then she must be wonderful.

CLINT

Oh, she is—but they're awful poor. I wisht I could do something to help—to prove how much I love her—but with our Scrooge of a Pa I'm hogtied.

ELSIE

I know. He's got enough money to do whatever he likes, but all he likes is money. When Ma was alive, everything was fine, but now—

CLINT

I mean, I can't even afford decent clothes! Look at this hat! If he don't want to spend it himself, why don't he give it to us? What good will it do us to inherit his money when we're too old to enjoy it?

ELSIE

But what's worse is he's never going to let either of us marry who we want—unless they strike gold or somethin'.

CLINT

Shh! Here he comes. Let's go somewhere's else and try and figure out a way to make the old man cough up a little somethin'.

Exeunt ELSIE and CLINT, talking together, as FLETCHER enters backwards, immediately followed by RICHMAN, with whom he is arguing.

RICHMAN

Get out, I say! Out 'a' my house, you three-legged horny-toad!

FLETCHER

What'd I do now?

RICHMAN

It's not what you did; it's what you want to do.

FLETCHER

I want to set in the house.

RICHMAN

‘Course you do. So’s you can stand there like a cactus with eyes, spying on me and lookin’ fer somethin’ to steal.

FLETCHER

How the dickens could anyone steal from you? You lock everything up tighter’n the bite of a mule and guard it day and night.

RICHMAN

And how in tarnation would you know that, unless you've been spying on me?

FLETCHER

Everyone knows that!

RICHMAN

I don't trust you and I don't want you in my livin' room. Not that I have any money hidden there.

FLETCHER

You have money hidden?

RICHMAN

I didn't say I do. I said, if I did, you'd try to steal it.

FLETCHER

What do I care anyway? I never see any ‘a’ your money. My pay is half what other farmhands make—and that's when you bother to pay me at all.

RICHMAN

What! Arguing with me? Complaints? I'll give you somethin' to complain about!

RICHMAN raises his hand as if to hit FLETCHER.

FLETCHER

All right, all right! I'm going!

RICHMAN

Jest you hold on, there. What are you taking with you?

FLETCHER

What would I take?

RICHMAN

Show me your hands.

FLETCHER holds out his hands.

And your other ones.

FLETCHER

My other hands?

RICHMAN

What have you got in your jeans?

FLETCHER

See fer yourself.

RICHMAN begins to pat FLETCHER down.

RICHMAN

These baggy jeans are made fer cartin' off stolen property.

FLETCHER

(Aside to audience) This feller really deserves to be robbed.

RICHMAN

What was that about robbing?

FLETCHER

I said you're really bein' careful not to be robbed.

RICHMAN

And don't fergit it.

FLETCHER

(Aside to audience) Greedy miser oughtter be dunked in the horse pond.

RICHMAN

What'd you say?

FLETCHER

What'd I say?

RICHMAN

What'd you say about greedy misers?

FLETCHER

I said all greedy misers oughtter be dunked in the horse pond.

RICHMAN

Who're you talkin' about?

FLETCHER

Greedy misers.

RICHMAN

And who are they?

FLETCHER

Penny-pinchers.

RICHMAN

But who do you mean?

FLETCHER

I'm naming no names. Wait—you didn't think I was talkin' 'bout you?

RICHMAN

One more word and I'll get the horsewhip!

FLETCHER

If the hat fits—

RICHMAN begins beating FLETCHER with his hat.

RICHMAN

Out!

FLETCHER escapes from the fusillade and then stands wagging his behind at RICHMAN.

FLETCHER

You missed a pocket!

RICHMAN

Out!

RICHMAN kicks FLETCHER in the behind, and FLETCHER exits hurriedly. RICHMAN addresses the audience.

I don't trust that feller. You know, it ain't easy easy having a lotta money in the house. There jest ain't no good place to hide it. A safe? That's the first place a burglar looks! Still, I ain't easy in my mind about that cashbox I buried behind the cowshed. Fifteen hundred is a lotta money.

Enter CLINT and ELSIE in conversation.

Dang! What did they hear? (*Calling to them.*) You two!

CLINT

Howdy, Pa.

RICHMAN

Have you been there long?

ELSIE

What?

RICHMAN

How much did you hear?

CLINT

We were talking.

RICHMAN

You must've heard!

ELSIE

Heard what?

RICHMAN

I was talkin' about how it ain't easy to find money these days. I was saying it must be nice to have fifteen hundred in cash.

CLINT

Yes, but we wanted to—

RICHMAN

I mean, I wouldn't want you to think I meant I l had fifteen hundred.

CLINT

We really weren't listening.

RICHMAN

I mean, it would be sweeter 'n a new filly if I did have fifteen hundred—

ELSIE

Pa—

RICHMAN

Yessireebob—if I had fifteen hundred I'd have no worries.

ELSIE

Tarnation, Pa, you got no worries now. Everybody knows you're about the richest man in town.

RICHMAN

What! How can you say that? My own children are out to get me!

CLINT

Out to get you?

RICHMAN

Spreadin' rumors that I'm rich, so some gang a' thieves'll come and cut my throat in the night. Between that and the money you two run through—

CLINT

When do I run through money?

RICHMAN

Lookit that outfit! How much did all that fancy stitchin' on your shirt cost you? And silver spurs—you don't even ride! I told off your sister yesterday fer her fancy dresses but you're even worse. Why, your hat alone'd feed a family a' five. I don't know where you get the money to dress so slick. You must be robbin' me.

CLINT

How could anyone possibly rob you?

RICHMAN

Than where d'you get all that cash?

CLINT

As a matter 'a' fact, I'm very lucky at cards, and I spend my winnin's on clothes.

RICHMAN

If you're lucky enough to win at cards, you should sock the cash away fer a rainy day, not blow it on fancy-schmancy clothes. But let's talk about something else. I got somethin' to say to you both.

ELSIE

And we both got somethin' to say to you, Pa.

RICHMAN

It's about marriage.

ELSIE

Oh!

RICHMAN

What's the matter. What're you afraid of, girl? The word or the thing?

CLINT

It's not marriage itself that scares us, Pa. We're jest afraid your idea of the thing might not be ours.

RICHMAN

Don't you worry none—I know what's best fer you. Now, listen.

He puts his hand on CLINT's shoulder.

Have you noticed the young filly that's moved in over to that little cabin? Name a' Mary Ann?

Behind RICHMAN's back, Elsie makes a huge "can you believe it—what luck!" face at CLINT. CLINT struggles not to appear too excited.

CLINT

Yeah, Pa, I seen her a few times.

RICHMAN

What do you think of her?

CLINT

She seems nice.

RICHMAN

And her looks?

CLINT

Very nice.

RICHMAN

And the way she takes care of her poor sick mother?

CLINT

As sweet as they come.

RICHMAN

A girl like that would make a good match, don't you think?

CLINT

Oh, yes, Pa.

RICHMAN

She'd make a good wife, don'tcha think?

CLINT

Very good..

RICHMAN

There's jest one slight problem. She's awful poor.

CLINT

Aw, Pa, what's money matter when you're in love?

RICHMAN

Shet your mouth! Money always matters! Still, I'm glad to hear that you agree with me about Mary Ann.

CLINT

Oh, yes, Pa! Oh, yes!

RICHMAN

Because her gentle daintiness has taken my heart, and I done made up my mind to marry her.

CLINT

What!

RICHMAN

What's the matter?

CLINT

You made up your mind—

RICHMAN

To marry Mary Ann. Yes.

CLINT

Who? You? You?

RICHMAN

Yes, me, me. What the dickens is the matter?