ACT ONE

A FLEA IN HER EAR

Camille, Ehirene and Antoinette
CATHERINE. (Sighs like a sullen child.) Ai ho ho ... (I don’t know ...)  
ANTOINETTE. Not even a little one?  
CATHERINE. Oh, ho hi. [Oh, all right ...] (He bends her over and gives her a greedy kiss. Just then, Etienne is heard outside the doors up center.)  
ETIENNE. (Offstage center.) Come right in, doctor ...  
ANTOINETTE and CATHERINE. Oops! (Camille scampers off up right. Antoinette flips through a magazine on the chaise as Etienne enters up center with Dr. Finache.)  
ETIENNE. Say, what are you doing in here?  
ANTOINETTE. Who, me? I’m taking the dinner orders.  
ETIENNE. Dinner orders? With the both of them out? Get back to work. Go dust something. Go on, hop to it!  
ANTOINETTE. Hmph! (She exits left, slamming the door.)  
FINACHE. I see you subscribe to the authoritarian theory of marriage.  
ETIENNE. It’s the only way to treat a wife. You run them or they’ll run you. And that’s not my cup of tea.  
FINACHE. Hear, hear.  
ETIENNE. Probably snooping around to see if I was after the chambermaid. I tell you, doc, she’s possessive. But in the fidelity department — a poodle. Never looks at another man.  
FINACHE. Why should she when she has you? Well, since your employer isn’t here ...  
ETIENNE. Siddown, I’ll keep you company. I got plenty of time and nothing to do.  
FINACHE. My lucky day. (Checks watch.) What time will Monsieur Chandebise get back?  
ETIENNE. Not for another half-hour.  
FINACHE. Damn. In that case — and despite the immense pleasure it would give me to share a moment with you — I’ll come back. I have a very sick patient whom I want to dispatch.  
ETIENNE. Dispatch? You mean...? (He razors a forefinger across his throat.)  
FINACHE. No, no, not in that sense. I mean that I’ll look at his tongue, prescribe a placebo and dispatch him a bill. Lack of medical outcome increasing my yearly income. If Monsieur Chandebise returns before I do, give him this. (Hands over a file.) Tell him I’ve examined the patient, the man’s in perfect health, and can be insured in full confidence.  
ETIENNE. Uh-huh.  
FINACHE. The matter doesn’t interest you — nor me either — but it will interest the Director of the Paris Life Company.  
ETIENNE. Well, the boss, sure ...  
FINACHE. So tell "the boss," if you will, that our Spanish grandee is tiptop. What the devil is his name?... Don Carlos Homenides de Histangua.  
ETIENNE. You don’t say. I know the guy! His wife’s waiting for Madame right now.  
FINACHE. What a small world. I examine the husband and his wife waits in the next room.  
ETIENNE. But listen, doc, while I’ve got you here ... What is it when you — take a seat — what is it when you get this constant jabbing pain right here?  
FINACHE. Right here? That’s usually the ovaries.  
ETIENNE. You’re kidding. It’s my ovaries? Already?  
FINACHE. I’m sorry, my friend. They’ll have to go.  
ETIENNE. Uh-uh. Oh no, not me. I got ‘em, I keep ‘em.  
FINACHE. Well, I won’t beg you for them.  
ETIENNE. Most doctors would, you know. Snip, snip.  
FINACHE. (Making to leave.) And with that — (Lucienne enters from right.)  
LUCIENNE. Etienne, are you sure that — ? Oh, I beg your pardon, monsieur.  
FINACHE. I beg yours, madame.  
LUCIENNE. Etienne, are you sure that Madame Chandebise is going to return?  
ETIENNE. She told me specific. “If Madame, uhh ...” What’s the name again?  
LUCIENNE. Homenides de Histangua.  
ETIENNE. Yeah. “If Madame de Blah Blah arrives, don’t let her go, I absolutely have to see her.”  
LUCIENNE. Well, I’ll just wait a moment longer.  
ETIENNE. You know, I was just conversing with the Doc here ...  
FINACHE. A gripping exchange.  
ETIENNE. This is Dr. Finache, medical examiner for Paris Life. (Finache and Lucienne bow and incline, respectively.) He says he saw a lot of your husband this morning.  
LUCIENNE. You don’t say.  
FINACHE. I do say. I had the honor of examining Señor Homenides de Histangua.  
LUCIENNE. My husband allowed himself to be examined? How bizarre.