FINACHE. (Taking out a small case.) In this box. (Camille reaches for it. Finache draws away.) Now what is it that hampers the verbo-facien faculty in you? A congenital fault in the dental vault. The sounds you make, instead of resonating against this natural barrier, get lost behind your face.

FINACHE. [Get lost behind my face?]

CAMILLE. Precisely. But you won't with this prosthesis — and look how prettily presented in this attractive traveling case. (Takes it out of the box.) An artificial palate cast in silver, like a magic lamp in a fairy tale.

FINACHE. [Ohh, it's beautiful! So I'll be able to talk with this?]

CAMILLE. I'm sorry?

FINACHE. I'm sorry?

CAMILLE. I'll be able to ... Wait! (He's about to put the palate in his mouth.)

FINACHE. No, no, no, you can't put it in yet. You don't know where it's been. You must soak the palate in a glass of water with some boric acid first.

CAMILLE. You're right, you're right. What I said was ... ]

FINACHE. (Articulating his best.) Will I, really, be able, to speak?

CAMILLE. With any talent you'll be doing Feydeau at the Comédie-Française.

FINACHE. I'm going to soak my palate right now!

CAMILLE. (Offstage right.) Camille!

CAMILLE. (Till my uncle I'll be right back.] (Camille exits left as Chandebise enters from up right.)

CHANDEBISE. Camille!

FINACHE. He'll be back in a moment.

CHANDEBISE. I'm glad you're here, Finache. I need to speak to you — upon a rather delicate question ...

FINACHE. My specialty. To wit?

CHANDEBISE. How shall I put this? You know that I have a tantalizing wife.

FINACHE. We are one on that.

CHANDEBISE. And you know that no one's less of a womanizer than yours truly.

FINACHE. Do I know that?

CHANDEBISE. Yes. What do you mean, "Do you know that"?

FINACHE. How would I know that without empirical evidence?

CHANDEBISE. Well, I'm telling you. No one's less of a womanizer than I. Now, Raymonde epitomizes for me both perfect spouse and perfect bedmate. And as a lover I have always been, if I do say so myself, quite up to the job.

FINACHE. "Up" to the job?

CHANDEBISE. Very "up" to the job.

FINACHE. Have you?

CHANDEBISE. Yes. What do you mean, "have I"?

FINACHE. Without empirical evidence ...

CHANDEBISE. Well, I'm telling you I have been up to the job. Flawless performances night after night, regular as clockwork.

FINACHE. Congratulations, but I don't see what this is prologue to ...

CHANDEBISE. Knock Knock Knock.

FINACHE. I'm sorry?

CHANDEBISE. This new show. Knock Knock Knock.

FINACHE. (Baffled.) Come in?

CHANDEBISE. I'm asking have you seen the play called Knock Knock Knock?

FINACHE. You might say I've seen it. I wasn't exactly alone that evening in my box.

CHANDEBISE. So there are a few holes in your memory.

FINACHE. Gaping.

CHANDEBISE. Doesn't matter. You recall that a certain young man is on honeymoon with his new bride. In their train compartment, he is, how shall I put it, introducing her to the principles of matrimonial grammar, teaching her how to ...

FINACHE. To conjugate?

CHANDEBISE. To conjugate, when suddenly — knock knock knock — a customs inspector calls out, "Declare your goods!" — making the young man lose his ... um ...

FINACHE. His goods?

CHANDEBISE. His goods. Well, this incident becomes an obsession. Every time the young man feels a rising impulse to, ah ...

FINACHE. Reintroduce...?

CHANDEBISE. Reintroduce the subject with his wife, he recalls the knock knock knock — and faht! His hopes are again ...

FINACHE. Deflated?

CHANDEBISE. Deflated.

FINACHE. Could be nasty.

CHANDEBISE. Indeed. And this is exactly what's happened to me.

FINACHE. You don't mean...?

CHANDEBISE. I do. One fine day or rather one filthy night
about a month ago I was feeling amorous. As is my wont I expressed
my inclination to Madame Chandebise. She greeted the proposition
with open arms. Then suddenly, I don’t know what happened …
FINACHE. Knock knock knock?
CHANDEBISE. Knock knock knock. A strange limpness came
over me. I became like a little boy. Like a very … tiny little boy.
FINACHE. That is hard.
CHANDEBISE. So to speak. Well, from then on, it became an
idle fice. The curtain would go up and come right back down. It
never failed.
FINACHE. Or rather, it did fail.
CHANDEBISE. This is no time for jokes, Finache!
FINACHE. Well, I hope you don’t think this a tragedy. It happens
sometime to every man. You’re just a victim of autosuggestion. So
use your brain and auto yourself out of suggestion. Show some
character, for God’s sake. And remember — where there’s a willy,
there’s a way.
CHANDEBISE. (Humorlessly) Ha, ha.
FINACHE. Everything you told me you should have told not me
but your wife. She would have laughed, you would have laughed,
and with the tension broken your tender nights would glide as if
on oiled casters.
CHANDEBISE. Maybe you’re right.
FINACHE. And for God’s sake get outside, play some tennis.
You’re working too hard. You see how you’re stooping? That’s why
I prescribed those special American suspenders. I bet you haven’t
even tried them on.
CHANDEBISE. I’m wearing them now, you see? (He shows a set
of very curious-looking suspenders.) Just to force myself to wear
them, I bequeathed my regular suspenders to my nephew Camille.
Good Lord, these are ugly.
FINACHE. You’re the only one who sees them.
CHANDEBISE. Not quite. My wife was just poking her nose
under there.
FINACHE. Sounds cozy.
CHANDEBISE. Would that it were. You’re sure this knock-knock-
knock isn’t a medical problem?
FINACHE. All right, take off your trousers and I’ll give you a
look. Declare your goods. (Chandebise is unbuttoning for him just as
Lucienne enters from up center with Etienne.)
LUCIENNE. Etienne —

CHANDEBISE. (Quickly unbuttoning.) Whoops! (To Finache:) It’ll
wait, it’ll wait.
LUCIENNE. Please tell Madame Chandebise that I’m here.
ETIENNE. Yes, madame. (Etienne exits up center.)
CHANDEBISE. Madame Homenides de Hhistangua, you’ve come
to see my wife?
LUCIENNE. Actually came back. I was here earlier, and saw this
gentleman as well.
FINACHE. A pleasure.
CHANDEBISE. Tell me, did you notice a certain edginess?
LUCIENNE. In the doctor?
CHANDEBISE. In my wife. She doesn’t seem to be herself today.
LUCIENNE. No, I didn’t notice anything.
CHANDEBISE. Maybe it’s me. (Raymonde enters up center.)
RAYMONDE. There you are, Lucy!
LUCIENNE. We meet again. ("Mwah!" "Mwah!" They kiss each
other. Aside to her:) The letter’s coming right behind me.
RAYMONDE. Excellent. (Etienne enters up center with letter on
a tray.)
ETIENNE. Monsieur Chandebise, this letter just came for you.
(Lucienne and Raymonde give each other a significant look.) It’s
marked “Personal and Private.”
CHANDEBISE. “Personal and Private”? For me…? (To the others:) If
you’ll allow me. (Etienne exits up center. Chandebise opens the letter.) I’ve
never gotten a letter marked personal and private before — good God!
RAYMONDE. What is it?
RAYMONDE. Some kind of trouble?
CHANDEBISE. Not at all, not at all. An insurance matter.
RAYMONDE. Insurance. Ah. (Aside to Lucienne:) You see how he
lied? And you asked for proof.
LUCIENNE. (Aside to Raymonde.) We’d better send a wire and
reserve that room at the Frisky Puss.
RAYMONDE. Ta-ta, darling! (Raymonde and Lucienne exit up cen-
ter.)
CHANDEBISE. Ta-ta. Women are extraordinary creatures, my
friend. You’ll never believe what’s happened. (Tournel appears up
right, file in hand.)
TOURNEL. So this is how you abandon me?
CHANDEBISE. Come in, Tournel. I wouldn’t mind having you
in on this.