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SF PERUSALS

A FLEA IN HER EAR

A Farce

by Georges Feydeau

Translated by
John Mortimer

SAMUEL FRENCH

samuelfrench.co.uk

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United Kingdom and World
excluding north america
plays@samuelfrench.co.uk
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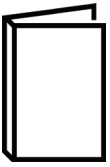
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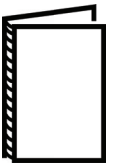
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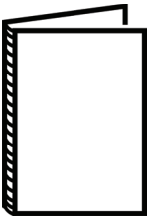
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ABOUT THE ADAPTOR

Sir John Mortimer was a novelist, playwright and barrister. He is best known for his character Horace Rumpole, which was later made into a TV series before turning to theatre. His most successful plays are: *Bermondsey, Collaborators, Come As You Are, The Dock Brief, Edwin, The Fear of Heaven, Gloucester Road, Hock and Soda Water, Knightbridge, Lady From Maxim's, Lunch Hour, Marble Arch, Mill Hill, A Voyage Round My Father, Cat Among the Pigeons, A Christmas Carol, A Flea in her Ear* and *A Little Hotel on the Side.*

A FLEA IN HER EAR

Presented by The National Theatre at The Old Vic on 8 February 1966, with the following cast of characters:

(*in order of their appearance*)

CAMILLE CHANDEBISE	Edward Hardwicke
ANTOINETTE PLUCHEUX	Sheila Reid
ETIENNE PLUCHEUX	Robert Lang
DR FINACHE	Kenneth Mackintosh
LUCIENNE HOMENIDES DE HISTANGUA	Anne Godley
RAYMONDE CHANDEBISE	Geraldine McEwan
VICTOR EMMANUEL CHANDEBISE	Albert Finney
ROMAIN TOURNEL	John Stride
CARLOS HOMENIDES DE HISTANGUA	Frank Wylie
EUGÉNIE	Petronella Barker
AUGUSTIN FERAILLON	Michael Turner
OLYMPE	Margo Cunningham
BAPTISTIN	Keith Marsh
HERR SCHWARZ	Peter Cellier
POCHE	Albert Finney
GUESTS AT THE HOTEL COQ, D'OR	Janie Booth, Maggie Riley, David Hargreaves, Christopher Timothy, Lewis Jones

The Play directed by Jacques Charon
Designed by André Levasseur

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I
The drawing-room of the Chandebises' house in the Boulevard Malesherbes, Paris

ACT II
The Hotel Coq d'Or in Montretout

ACT III
The Chandebises' drawing-room

ACT I

Scene—The drawing-room, of the **CHANDEBISES***' house in the Boulevard Malesherbes. Afternoon.*

French windows right open on to a balcony. The main entrance is up centre, and consists of double doors leading to a hallway and corridors to right and left, There are doors to inner rooms up right centre, up left centre and down left. There are doors to inner rooms up right centre, up left centre and down left. The fireplace is up left.

When the curtain rises, **CAMILLE** *is discovered standing by the filing cabinet up left centre. His cleft palate makes his speech almost impossible to understand.* **ANTOINETTE** *enters up right centre, moves to* **CAMILLE**, *taps his shoulder, and kisses him.*

CAMILLE *(moving down stage)* Hare foo. Please, please be careful!

ANTOINETTE Calm down. The family's out.

CAMILLE Hoh, yes...

ANTOINETTE Come on. Give us a kiss. Well, wake up!

Voices are heard off up centre. **CAMILLE** *exits up left.* **ANTOINETTE** *moves to the door up right.* **ETIENNE** *enters up centre, ushering in* **FINACHE.**

ETIENNE Come along in, Doctor.

FINACHE *enters up centre, moves to the table left and puts his hat, stick and gloves on the table.*

(to **ANTOINETTE***)* What're *you* up to?

ANTOINETTE Me?

ETIENNE You!

ANTOINETTE I came...

ETIENNE Go on.

ANTOINETTE To ask about dinner.

ETIENNE When the family's out! Back to your hot stove and bend over it! We don't have cooks in the drawing-room.

ANTOINETTE But...

ETIENNE Out!

ANTOINETTE *exits up centre, closing the doors.*

FINACHE The Lord and Master.

ETIENNE *(crossing down right)* That's the way to treat them. If you're not in charge of them they're in charge of you. And I'm not having that!

FINACHE Excellent!

ETIENNE You know, Doctor. That little wife of mine's as faithful as a poodle, but as jealous as a tiger. She comes in here to spy on me! She's got some strange idea—about me and the housemaid...

FINACHE How very strange...

ETIENNE *(moving centre)* Me? A housemaid? Really.

FINACHE Ridiculous! *(Moving centre)* If your master's not at home...

ETIENNE Don't worry. I've got time to kill—I'll keep you company.

FINACHE I don't want to impose...

ETIENNE On my good nature?

FINACHE Certainly.

ETIENNE Think nothing of it.

FINACHE *(bows ironically)* When will he be back?

ETIENNE Quarter of an hour—at least.

FINACHE *(picking up his hat and stick)* Oh, in that case... However delightful your conversation—

ETIENNE Too kind...

FINACHE —pleasure isn't everything. I've got a patient to see. Must finish him off.

ETIENNE Oh...

FINACHE What? Oh, no—thank you very much. I'm cutting my visit short, not my patient's life. Back in a quarter of an hour... *(He moves up centre)*

ETIENNE *(moving up centre)* I must let you go.

FINACHE It's so hard to tear myself away. *(Handing* **ETIENNE** *a certificate)* If your master comes back before I do, give him this. Tell him I examined the customer he sent me, and he's in first rate condition.

ETIENNE Oh, yes.

FINACHE Not that you care.

ETIENNE No. *(He moves to the table left and puts the certificate on it)*

FINACHE *(moving down centre)* Nor do I. But since your master's the managing director of the Boston Life Insurance Company for Paris and the provinces...

ETIENNE The governor...

FINACHE The governor, if you prefer the word, should know that his Spanish insurance risk is AI. What's he call himself—Don Carlos Homenides de Histangua?

ETIENNE His wife's here now! She's waiting next door for madame.

FINACHE Amazingly small world! I examine the husband this morning—and now the wife's next door.

ETIENNE And they both had dinner here—yesterday!

FINACHE Unbelievable!

ETIENNE *(sitting left of the table)* Doctor. Seeing you're here...

FINACHE You don't stand on ceremony, do you?

ETIENNE Me? Oh, no. I'm very easy-going. I want to talk to you; because I was having a word the other day with my good lady...

FINACHE Madame Chandebise.

ETIENNE Not the mistress, my good lady.

FINACHE Your wife?

ETIENNE Yes. Now when you've got this hammering inside you—do pull up a chair...

FINACHE Thanks. *(He sits right of the table)*

ETIENNE Night and day. Both sides of the abdomen. Remorseless.

FINACHE *(putting his hat on the table)* Now that's a condition we often find...

ETIENNE Yes?

FINACHE With some gynaecological troubles.

ETIENNE I see.

FINACHE Probably the ovaries.

ETIENNE That's what I've got?

FINACHE We'll have to have them out!

ETIENNE Careful now. *(Rising and moving up centre)* If I've got them I'm keeping them.

FINACHE *(also getting up)* I won't insist—on having them. Not for the moment. *(He moves down left)*

LUCIENNE *enters up right and moves up centre.*

LUCIENNE Look here, excuse me. You're sure Madame Chandbise'll be back?

ETIENNE She said to me, she said, "If Madame—" well, anyway... whatever your name is.

LUCIENNE Homenides de Histangua.

ETIENNE That's right. She told me, "Don't let her go. I've got to see her."

LUCIENNE That's what she said in her letter. I can't understand it. I'll wait a little longer. *(She moves above the sofa)*

ETIENNE That's perfectly all right. I was just passing the time of day with the doctor.

FINACHE He's delightful company.

ETIENNE That's true. You know Dr Finache?

FINACHE Madame.

ETIENNE Chief Medical Officer of the Boston Life.

LUCIENNE Ah! *(She moves down centre)*

ETIENNE Tells me he saw your husband this very morning.

LUCIENNE What a coincidence!

FINACHE *(moving to* **LUCIENNE** *centre)* I had the honour of examining Don Carlos de Histangua.

ETIENNE *moves down left.*

LUCIENNE My husband had himself examined? What on earth for?

FINACHE Insurance companies are ridiculously inquisitive. But I must congratulate you. What a husband you have, madame! What a constitution! What stamina!

LUCIENNE *(turning away right)* Don't I know it!

FINACHE It's very flattering.

LUCIENNE But exhausting!

FINACHE You get nothing without working for it in this world.

ETIENNE It's what Madame Plucheux dreams about.

LUCIENNE Who on earth's that?

ETIENNE My wife. Too much for me, I can tell you, she needs a man like madame's husband.

FINACHE Then with madame's permission and the Spanish gentleman's consent—the thing might be arranged!

ETIENNE God forbid!

LUCIENNE Really, Doctor! Anyway, I couldn't allow it either.

FINACHE I'm sorry. *(Picking up his hat from the table)* It's this ghastly butler. He makes me say the most idiotic things. Back in a quarter of an hour. Charming to meet you... *(He moves up centre)*

ETIENNE *(moving up centre)* It's when I lean forward like this they get me.

FINACHE What?

ETIENNE Those ovaries!

FINACHE Oh, take three cascara tablets. That'll give them something to think about.

FINACHE *and* **ETIENNE** *exit up centre.*

LUCIENNE *(moving to the window right)* Seven minutes past one! *(She picks up a magazine from the table right)* This is what Raymonde calls counting the seconds till she sees me. Really! *(She sits right centre)*

CAMILLE *enters up left with a file and moves to the cabinet.*

CAMILLE *(putting the file in the cabinet)* Ho—Hi—Hohiy. *(Oh, I'm sorry) (He moves down centre)*

LUCIENNE What did you say?

CAMILLE Haham's ha—ing hor he hea Hon Hon Hife Cumbee? *(Madame's waiting for the Head of the Boston Life Company?)*

LUCIENNE I'm terribly sorry...

CAMILLE Haham's ha—ing hor he hea Hon Hon Hife Cumhee?

LUCIENNE *(rising and backing right)* I can't understand a word you're saying.

CAMILLE He harsed H—Ham here Hee Hee Hirerector? *(I asked if madame's here to see the Director?)*

LUCIENNE *(moving to* **CAMILLE** *centre)* No. Me. Franzuski—Franchese. Me French.

CAMILLE He Hoo! *(Me too!)*

LUCIENNE *(backing to the window)* Are you looking for the butler? I mean I don't belong here. I'm just waiting for Madame Chandebise and...

CAMILLE *(backing to the door up left)* Ho Horry. *(So sorry)* If madame's waiting for the head of the Boston Life Company.

LUCIENNE Yes.

CAMILLE Ho horry. *(So sorry)*

CAMILLE *exits up left.*

LUCIENNE What a monster!

ETIENNE *enters up centre.*

ETIENNE You're not bored?

LUCIENNE *(moving up centre)* No, but would you kindly explain—there was a man here...

ETIENNE A man!

LUCIENNE Spoke the most extraordinary language. Ho Horry H'am...

ETIENNE It's Camille!

LUCIENNE A foreigner?

LUCIENNE *and* **ETIENNE** *move down centre.*

ETIENNE Not at all. The master's nephew. Blood relative. I see your difficulty. He butchers the language. Kills off his consonants entirely.

LUCIENNE Good heavens!

ETIENNE It's embarrassing, till you get used to it. I'm just starting to understand...

LUCIENNE He's giving you lessons?

ETIENNE In time—the ear grows accustomed.

LUCIENNE *(moving left below the table)* I suppose it must.

ETIENNE The master's taken him on as a secretary. Who else would employ him?

LUCIENNE A man with nothing but vowels to offer!

ETIENNE It's not enough! He gives you the consonants when he's writing; but we can't all communicate by letter! Such a serious, steady boy. Handicapped! *(Moving left centre)* So far as anyone knows, madame, he's never had a woman in his life!

LUCIENNE Really!

ETIENNE *(simply)* Not so far as we know.

RAYMONDE *(offstage)* Antoinette, my husband's not back yet—and have you seen Madame de Histangua?

ETIENNE *(moving up centre)* Madame's here. *(He opens the door)*

LUCIENNE *(moving up centre)* At last!

RAYMONDE *enters up centre and kisses* **LUCIENNE.**

RAYMONDE My poor darling—I'm sorry. *(She moves to the stool up right)* You can go, Etienne.

ETIENNE Yes, madame. Madame will excuse me...

ETIENNE *exits up centre.*

LUCIENNE What's the matter?

RAYMONDE *(taking off her hat)* I've kept you waiting. *(She puts her hat on the stool)*

LUCIENNE Have you. Really!

RAYMONDE *(moving above the table left centre and putting her bag on it)* I had to go such a long way. I'll tell you all about it, Lucienne. I wrote and asked you to come because—a terrible thing's happened. My husband's unfaithful.

LUCIENNE Victor Emmanuel?

RAYMONDE Exactly! Victor Emmanuel!

LUCIENNE You take my breath away!

RAYMONDE *(crossing down right)* I'll expose him!

LUCIENNE *(moving down centre)* You mean you can prove it?

RAYMONDE What? Oh, no. I can't. Oh, but I will...

LUCIENNE What?

RAYMONDE Prove it.

LUCIENNE How?

RAYMONDE I don't know. But you're here...

LUCIENNE Well?

RAYMONDE You're going to prove it for me!

LUCIENNE Me?

RAYMONDE *(moving centre and taking* **LUCIENNE***'s hand)* Don't say "no", Lucienne. We were bosom friends at the convent. All right, we've drifted apart over the years, but some things last! I left you Lucienne Vicard. Now I find you Lucienne Homenides de Histangua. The name's longer, but the heart's still in the same place. I always think of you as my best friend. *(She leads* **LUCIENNE** *right)*

LUCIENNE Of course... *(She sits in the chair right centre)*

RAYMONDE *(sitting right on the sofa)* So I naturally come to you when I have an enormous favour to ask...

LUCIENNE Thank you very much!

RAYMONDE So tell me what to do!

LUCIENNE How do you mean?

RAYMONDE To expose my husband. Trap him...

LUCIENNE Is that why you dragged me here?

RAYMONDE Well, of course.

LUCIENNE How do you know he's trappable? He might be a model of virtue.

RAYMONDE Him!

LUCIENNE You've got no proof.

RAYMONDE Certain things don't deceive you...

LUCIENNE Including Victor Emmanuel?

RAYMONDE What would you say if *your* husband, suddenly, after having been a husband—and what a husband! —suddenly stopped—like that! Between one day and the next.

LUCIENNE I'd say—phew!

RAYMONDE Is that what you'd say? You'd say "phew"? That's what you would say. I was just like you. "This endless love"! That perpetual spring. Boring! Tedious! Oh, for a little cloud! A few obstacles. I even thought about taking a lover just for the worry of it.

LUCIENNE You—a lover!

RAYMONDE Certainly! You know, you get these moments. Oh, I'd even chosen him. Romain Tournel, to mention no names. He was here with you at dinner the other night. Didn't you notice how he fancied me? You astonish me. Well—we were on the very brink...

LUCIENNE Oh!

RAYMONDE *(rising)* He said, "As your husband's my best friend I feel it's incumbent upon me to..." Well, why shouldn't I take a lover! Now my Victor Emmanuel's deceiving me! *(She moves left and puts her gloves on the table)*

LUCIENNE *(getting up and moving centre)* Shall I tell you something?

RAYMONDE What?

LUCIENNE You're secretly mad about your Victor Emmanuel.

RAYMONDE Mad?

LUCIENNE If you're not—why all the fuss?

RAYMONDE *(moving down left)* Well, I may want to deceive him, but for him to deceive me! No! It's going too far!

LUCIENNE I like your sense of morality!

RAYMONDE Aren't I totally justified?

LUCIENNE Yes, yes. Only look. What you told me doesn't prove anything!

RAYMONDE What? When a husband's been a raging torrent for years, and then suddenly—pfutt! Nothing. Not a trickle...

LUCIENNE *(sitting right of the table left centre)* Spain's full of dried-up rivers. But they're still in the same old beds...

RAYMONDE *(facing front)* Oh...

LUCIENNE You know, it's like those men in casinos, who try to impress everyone by risking millions and then one day—phfft! —they're reduced to ten francs.

RAYMONDE Ten francs would be all right, but he doesn't even play. All he does is walk round the table and watch.

LUCIENNE All the better! It doesn't mean he's spending his money on someone else. He's just bankrupt.

RAYMONDE *(moving above the table)* Oh, yes? What about *that,* then? *(She takes a pair of braces from her bag)*

LUCIENNE What about it?

RAYMONDE A pair of braces.

LUCIENNE I can see that.

RAYMONDE And who do you think they belong to?

LUCIENNE Your husband, I assume.

RAYMONDE You admit it!

LUCIENNE Not exactly. I just presume that if you have a pair of braces about you they belong to your husband, *and no one else!*

RAYMONDE *(taking her handbag to the stool up right and returning down centre)* Precisely! And now perhaps you can explain why he got them this morning, through the post.

LUCIENNE Through the post?

RAYMONDE In a parcel which I opened by mistake, when I went through his letters.

LUCIENNE Why go through his letters?

RAYMONDE To see what's in them.

LUCIENNE Sound reason...

RAYMONDE Well!

LUCIENNE That's what you call a parcel "opened by mistake"?

RAYMONDE Of course it was a mistake. It wasn't meant for me.

LUCIENNE I see...

RAYMONDE You agree that if someone posts him his braces, it's because he left them behind in some—*somewhere?*

LUCIENNE *(rising and moving down stage)* It seems to follow.

RAYMONDE *(moving right of* **LUCIENNE***)* Yes—and do you know where it was? This *"somewhere"?*

LUCIENNE You're making my flesh creep.

RAYMONDE "The Hotel Coq d'Or", my darling.

LUCIENNE What on earth's that?

RAYMONDE Well, it's not the Christian Science Reading Room.

LUCIENNE "The Hotel Coq d'Or."

RAYMONDE *(moving to the tallboy and taking out a box)* Look! The box they came in. Printed label, and then, my husband's address: "Monsieur Chandebise, 95 Boulevard Malesherbes." *(She gives* **LUCIENNE** *the box)*

LUCIENNE The Hotel Coq d'Or.

RAYMONDE And in Montretout, my darling. *(She takes the box back)* A name that speaks volumes! It's repulsive! But it adds up! Now I can understand it all. *(She returns the box to the drawer)*

LUCIENNE Oh? Absolutely.

RAYMONDE *(moving above the sofa)* Of course I had my doubts. Just because my husband seemed to be going through...a slight period of...

LUCIENNE Drought?

RAYMONDE Exactly. I said to myself, "Oh, well," I said. "What of it?" But now—this! This has sent me away—with an enormous flea in my ear... *(She moves left of the sofa)*

LUCIENNE Obviously.

RAYMONDE If you could see this hotel, darling. It looks as if it'd been carved out of nougat.

LUCIENNE *(moving to left of* **RAYMONDE***)* You mean, you know it?

RAYMONDE I've just been there.

LUCIENNE What?

RAYMONDE That's why I'm late. I wanted to be quite sure! So I told myself, "You must question the management." But how

do you question that type of management? They refused to remember anything.

LUCIENNE That's the first rule of their profession.

RAYMONDE You know what the terrible man there said to me?

LUCIENNE What?

RAYMONDE He said, "Madame," he said, "if I gave away the names of my guests you'd be the first never to come here any more." He said that to me! Then he shut up. Like a clam. *(She moves down right)*

LUCIENNE Oh, clam's too good for that sort.

RAYMONDE You see—men stick together. *(She moves to* **LUCIENNE***)* We must rely on us! Now—you know so much more about these things than I do, darling.

LUCIENNE *(moving down left centre)* I wouldn't say that.

RAYMONDE You know the facts. And with your touch of genius.

LUCIENNE *(sitting right of the table)* There is that! Of course.

RAYMONDE What shall I do?

LUCIENNE Well, now. Let's see. Go to Victor Emmanuel—have it out with him!

RAYMONDE *(moving down centre)* Lucienne! You know he'd only lie to me! There's no liar like a man—unless it's a woman.

LUCIENNE *(rising)* You're right. *(Moving to* **RAYMONDE***)* Men and women are the only two of God's creatures who lie at all. Listen. There's one trick I've seen in plays and...

RAYMONDE What? Tell me.

LUCIENNE It's pretty loathsome. I mean I'd only do it to a man. But—you take a sheet of highly perfumed writing paper and on it you write a burning, passionate letter...

RAYMONDE Yes?

LUCIENNE To your husband.

RAYMONDE Oh...

LUCIENNE As if it came from another woman—and you end up—by arranging a meeting!

RAYMONDE A meeting?

LUCIENNE Which you go to, naturally. And if he comes to meet you—you've got him!

RAYMONDE *(bringing the desk from down right to the sofa)* Of course. You're right. It's rather revolting, but the old-fashioned ways are best. We'll do it now.

LUCIENNE Good.

RAYMONDE He might recognize my handwriting.

LUCIENNE If you've written to him before.

RAYMONDE But he doesn't know yours. *(Moving to* **LUCIENNE***)* You're going to write it! Are you my best friend or not? *(She takes* **LUCIENNE***'s hand)*

LUCIENNE You're leading me into mortal sin...

RAYMONDE That's where you'll find my husband.

LUCIENNE That won't do me much good apparently. *(Moving to the sofa)* All right. Give me the writing paper. *(She sits behind the desk)*

RAYMONDE Here. *(She moves left of the desk)*

LUCIENNE Not yours. He'll recognize it.

RAYMONDE *(moving to the cabinet right)* Of course. Silly of me. This'll do. *(She brings down some paper)* I bought it to give my dear little nephews for their thank you letters.

LUCIENNE That! He'll think it's an affair with a cook. He'll never go.

RAYMONDE You're right... *(She returns the paper to the cabinet)*

LUCIENNE Haven't you got any decadent writing paper? Something suggestive...

RAYMONDE There's this mauve. It's not all that suggestive.

LUCIENNE But drenched in perfume...

RAYMONDE *(moving to the bell-push right and ringing it)* I've got the stuff! A bottle of "Scarlet Woman". I was going to send it back—it makes me sneeze. Wait a moment.

CAMILLE *enters up left.*

CAMILLE Ho Horry. *(So sorry)*

RAYMONDE Can I help you, Camille?

CAMILLE *(moving down centre)* Don't worry. I wanted to see if Victor Emmanuel was back.

RAYMONDE Not yet. Why?

CAMILLE There's the post to be signed, and a contract.

RAYMONDE He can't be much longer.

CAMILLE I'll wait.

RAYMONDE All right. What're you staring at, darling?

LUCIENNE No—nothing, really...

CAMILLE You see Raymonde came home in the end. You didn't have to wait too long.

LUCIENNE Honestly. I remember you perfectly—we even had a little chat.

RAYMONDE What he said was—you didn't have to wait too long.

CAMILLE That's it! That's it!

LUCIENNE Not too long, thank you.

RAYMONDE Camille Chandebise, our nephew. Mme Carlos Homenides de Histangua.

LUCIENNE *(rising and offering* **CAMILLE** *her hand)* Delighted to meet you. You must excuse me. *(Withdrawing her hand before* **CAMILLE** *can kiss it)* I didn't catch all you said just now. A little hard of...

CAMILLE Hearing? I have an impediment—in my speech. I don't say words clearly.

LUCIENNE Charming! Charming! *(Moving to* **RAYMONDE***)* What's he talking about?

RAYMONDE He says he has an impediment in his speech.

LUCIENNE Really? Well, perhaps a little tiny—hitch. *(Moving down right)* Now you mention it...

CAMILLE You're too kind.

ANTOINETTE *enters up centre.*

ANTOINETTE You rang, madame.

RAYMONDE Yes. Fetch me a big bottle of perfume—you'll find it on the right of the dressing-table.

ANTOINETTE Yes, madame.

RAYMONDE You'll see a "Scarlet Woman"... smouldering on the label.

ANTOINETTE Certainly, madame.

ANTOINETTE *exits up right pinching* **CAMILLE** *as she passes.*

CAMILLE Ouch!

RAYMONDE
LUCIENNE } *(together)* What?

CAMILLE Touch of neuralgia...

RAYMONDE In the...

CAMILLE Hi' ...

RAYMONDE The change in the weather.

CAMILLE I must get on with my work. *(Moving up left)* Madame.

LUCIENNE Sir!

CAMILLE My respects.

CAMILLE *exits up left.*

LUCIENNE I think it's wonderful. How do you understand?

RAYMONDE Is *that* why you were staring?

LUCIENNE Of course. *(She sits at the desk)*

RAYMONDE You get used to it. How sweet of you to pretend not to notice...

LUCIENNE I wouldn't hurt his feelings...

ANTOINETTE *enters up right to right of* **RAYMONDE.**

ANTOINETTE Is this the one, madame?

RAYMONDE Thank you. Right—now before Victor Emmanuel gets back...

ANTOINETTE *exits up centre.*

LUCIENNE Well, now how are we going to hook the fish?

RAYMONDE That's the question. *(She sits in the chair right centre)*

LUCIENNE The question is—where?

RAYMONDE What?

LUCIENNE Where did this mysterious lady become besotted with Victor Emmanuel?

RAYMONDE Where do you suggest?

LUCIENNE Been to the theatre lately?

RAYMONDE Last Wednesday. The Palais Royal. We went with Monsieur Tournel...

LUCIENNE Monsieur Tournel?

RAYMONDE Who's almost my lover...

LUCIENNE Oh, him. *(Writing)* Now—listen to this— "Dear Sir, Having noticed you the other evening at the Palais Royal Theatre..."

RAYMONDE Doesn't that sound a little formal—for love at first sight?

LUCIENNE Formal?

RAYMONDE As if you were serving a writ. *(Rising and crossing down left)* I'd come right out with it. "I was the girl who couldn't take her eyes off you that night at the Palais Royal..."

LUCIENNE You've obviously got a talent for this sort of thing.

RAYMONDE I was only saying what *I'd* write.

LUCIENNE All right, I agree. "I'm the girl who couldn't take her eyes off you—"

RAYMONDE *(moving centre)* "—that night at the Palais Royal." Hot, yearning—and simple.

LUCIENNE You're really living the part, aren't you? "You were in a box with your wife and another man..."

RAYMONDE Monsieur Tournel...

LUCIENNE "Since then—you are all I dream of."

RAYMONDE *(moving above the sofa to the window)* Isn't that going too far?

LUCIENNE Other people always go too far.

RAYMONDE If you're sure...

LUCIENNE "I'm ready to commit a folly. Will you join me? I'll be waiting for you today. Five o'clock. In the Hotel Coq d'Or in Montretout."

RAYMONDE The same hotel? Won't he be suspicious?

LUCIENNE He'll be stimulated—beyond endurance. "The room will be booked in the name of Monsieur Chandebise."

RAYMONDE "I rely on you..."

LUCIENNE "I rely on you." Marvellous! I tell you, you've got a talent for this sort of thing.

RAYMONDE I'm starting to learn...

LUCIENNE *(writing)* "From one who loves you…" Now—drenched in perfume…

RAYMONDE *(giving* **LUCIENNE** *the perfume)* Here we are!

LUCIENNE *sprinkles the letter.*

LUCIENNE That'll do… *(She puts the perfume on the table right centre)*

RAYMONDE Oh, dear!

LUCIENNE *(rising)* Blotched!

RAYMONDE What a shame.

LUCIENNE Yes.

RAYMONDE You'll have to do it again.

LUCIENNE *(sitting as before)* Not at all! That'll come in very useful. *(Writing)* "P.S. Why can't I stop crying when I write to you? Let them be tears of joy and not despair." Private. To Monsieur Victor Emmanuel Chandebise. Ninety-five Boulevard Malesherbes. Now we need a messenger. Who can we send?

RAYMONDE You, of course.

LUCIENNE *(rising)* You're—not serious!

RAYMONDE *(returning the desk to the window)* We can't send a servant—he'd be recognized. And I can't do it myself. I mean if my husband asked for a description of the woman who brought the letter—and got a description of me—the cat would just leap out of the bag! You're the one to do it!

LUCIENNE *(moving centre)* Whatever next!

RAYMONDE Are you my best friend or not?

LUCIENNE I suppose so. You certainly make the most of it.

The doorbell rings.

RAYMONDE That must be my husband. *(She opens the door up right)* Hurry up. Out this way. Take the door on the right and you are in the hall.

LUCIENNE *collects her gloves and exits up right.* **RAYMONDE** *replaces the cap on the perfume bottle, puts it back on the table, and moves down right.* **CHANDEBISE** *enters centre, followed by* **ETIENNE.**

CHANDEBISE *(giving* **ETIENNE** *his cane)* You say the doctor called?

ETIENNE Yes, sir.

CHANDEBISE Good! Excellent! Go in, my dear fellow.

TOURNEL *enters centre with a brief-case, which he puts on the table left.*

Give me a moment. Must sign the post. *(He puts his hat and gloves on the table down left)*

TOURNEL *moves down left of the table.*

RAYMONDE Camille's been waiting as if you were the Second Coming.

CHANDEBISE Oh, it's you.

TOURNEL Good morning dear lady.

RAYMONDE Good morning, Mr Tournel *(To* **CHANDEBISE***)* Yes, it's me.

CHANDEBISE I met Tournel on the stairs, so we came up together.

RAYMONDE Oh, yes...

TOURNEL I've brought a list of new clients.

CHANDEBISE *(hitching up his trousers with his hands in his pockets)* Splendid. You can give me that right away.

RAYMONDE Are you having trouble with your braces by any chance?

CHANDEBISE As a matter of fact I am.

RAYMONDE Are they the ones I bought for you?

CHANDEBISE What's that? Yes, of course.

RAYMONDE They seemed to be—quite satisfactory.

CHANDEBISE It's because I've pulled them up too tight.

RAYMONDE *(moving centre)* Let me adjust them for you.

CHANDEBISE Please don't bother. I can adjust them myself.

RAYMONDE Have it your own way.

CHANDEBISE *(moving up left)* Excuse me. Be with you in a moment.

CHANDEBISE *exits up left.*

TOURNEL Carry on! Carry on!

CAMILLE *(offstage)* A—Harst *(At last)*

CHANDEBISE *(offstage)* All right! Some people don't have to rush round all day... *(He closes the door)*

TOURNEL *(moving centre)* Oh, Raymonde! Raymonde! You're all I dream of!

RAYMONDE Not now, thank you very much. Not when he's unfaithful.

TOURNEL What?

RAYMONDE *(moving towards the door up right)* That sort of thing's perfectly all right when you've got nothing else on your mind.

TOURNEL *(following her)* But, Raymonde—Raymonde, you said—you let me hope...

RAYMONDE Did I? I suppose I did. But he didn't have his braces then. Now that he's got his braces—good-bye!

RAYMONDE *exits up right.*

TOURNEL She's going to be a hard nut to crack! Braces. What's she talking about? Braces!

CAMILLE *enters up left.*

CAMILLE *(moving up centre)* Monsieur Tournel, my uncle is asking for you.

TOURNEL *(smiling)* What?

CAMILLE My uncle is asking for you.

TOURNEL *(crossing the table left)* Don't talk with your mouth full, old boy, it's rude. *(He picks up his brief-case)*

CAMILLE Wait. "My uncle is ask-ing for you!"

TOURNEL My uncle is asking for you! Why not say so!

TOURNEL *exits up left.*

CAMILLE What an uncouth fellow! Extraordinary thing! *(Moving left centre)* I go to all the trouble of fetching him and he gives me a mouthful of abuse!

FINACHE *and* **ETIENNE** *enter up centre.*

ETIENNE The master's back.

FINACHE Good. *(He moves down centre)*

ETIENNE I'll tell him.

ETIENNE *exits up left.*

CAMILLE It's a bit thick! I say to him, most politely. "My uncle is asking for you." He makes me repeat it. I write it down for him, and he has the ice-cold nerve to come back with, "All right, why couldn't you say so?" It's the last time I do a favour for a pig like that!

FINACHE You rehearsing a dramatic monologue?

CAMILLE It's you, Doctor! I was just complaining about a certain person who...

FINACHE *(moving right centre)* Oh, all right. Don't explain. Well, you young scallywag? Been on the tiles lately?

CAMILLE *(moving centre)* Oh! Shhh!

FINACHE Of course. You're supposed to be the virginal young Camille. You've got to keep up your reputation...

FINACHE *and* **CAMILLE** *circle each other.*

CAMILLE Please!

FINACHE Doctors have a way of catching little plaster saints with their trousers down. I must say it's very funny. Everyone thinking that you're so innocent.

CAMILLE I suppose it is really...

FINACHE Have you taken my advice?

CAMILLE What?

FINACHE The Hotel Coq d'Or.

CAMILLE Please!

FINACHE *and* **CAMILLE** *circle again.*

FINACHE Why? We're alone—between friends. You've been there?

CAMILLE Yes.

FINACHE What did I tell you? *(He moves right)*

CAMILLE Oh! *(He moves left)*

FINACHE Isn't it? When I want a little—relaxation I never go anywhere else. All right, come down to earth and go and fetch your uncle.

CAMILLE Yes. Of course. *(He moves up centre)*

FINACHE *(moving up centre)* While I think of it, I'll give you your infernal machine.

CAMILLE What infernal machine?

FINACHE What I promised you. At least you'll sound like a human being.

CAMILLE You've got it!

FINACHE Now your trouble is—the roof of your mouth hasn't formed properly. The sounds don't bounce off it. They float up—and they get lost somewhere behind your face.

CAMILLE That's it.

FINACHE *(producing a box with a false palate in it)* So—I've brought you a sounding board. Isn't it pretty?

CAMILLE Let's see. *(He takes the box)*

FINACHE A silver roof to your mouth.

CAMILLE Oh!

FINACHE Not everyone can say that.

CAMILLE I'll be able to speak!

FINACHE What?

CAMILLE I'll be able... *(He starts to insert the palate)*

FINACHE Not yet! First soak it in boracic. Who knows where it's been!

CAMILLE You're right! No, but I said. I shall be able to speak.

FINACHE Of course you will be able to speak! With a little talent you'll be in the *Comedie Francaise.*

CAMILLE *(moving up centre)* Ah! I'll soak it in boracic.

CHANDEBISE *(offstage)* Camille!

FINACHE Just a minute. They're calling you.

CAMILLE Tell them—I'll be back in a minute.

CAMILLE *exits up centre.*

CHANDEBISE *(offstage)* Camille!

CHANDEBISE *enters up left.*

FINACHE He'll be back in a minute. *(He moves down centre)*

CHANDEBISE *(moving down left of* **FINACHE***)* Finache!

FINACHE He's got something to see to. Keeping well?

CHANDEBISE Thank God it's you—just the man I wanted to see.

FINACHE I was here earlier. Etienne told you?

CHANDEBISE *(moving below the table to left of it)* With Histangua's certificate.

FINACHE It's on the table.

CHANDEBISE It seems he's a good risk.

FINACHE First rate.

CHANDEBISE Thanks.

FINACHE *(sitting right of the table)* What did you want to see me about?

CHANDEBISE *(sitting left of the table)* Yes. Well. Now—I wanted to consult you. It's rather a delicate matter. But, quite frankly, a most extraordinary thing's happened to me.

FINACHE What sort of thing?

CHANDEBISE It's not very easy to explain. Well. You know I have an extremely attractive wife...

FINACHE Hear, hear!

CHANDEBISE Good! And no one's less interested in other women than your humble servant.

FINACHE Ah.

CHANDEBISE What do you mean "Ah"? Why do you say "Ah"?

FINACHE I really don't know.

CHANDEBISE I'm telling you! Raymonde's everything to me. Wife and mistress. And I don't wish to boast but between you and me, I'm a first-rate husband!

FINACHE Ah?

CHANDEBISE What do you mean "Ah"? Why do you keep saying "Ah"?

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