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SF PERUSALS

Ken Ludwig's
Leading Ladies

A Comedy

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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Originally produced
by

The Cleveland Play House
Michael Bloom, Artistic Director
Dean Gladden, Managing Director
on September 7th, 2004

and

Alley Theatre
Gregory Boyd, Artistic Director
Terry Dwyer , Managing Director
on October 15th, 2004

LEADING LADIES had its world premiere at the Alley Theatre, Gregory Boyd, Artistic Director, in association with the Cleveland Playhouse, Michael Bloom, Artistic Director, Dean R.Gladden, Managing Director, on October 15th, 2004. The Scenic Designer was Neil Patel, the Costume Designer was Judith Dolan, the Lighting Designer was David Weiner and the Sound Designer was John Gromada and Associate Sound Designer was Ryan Rumery. The Choreographer was Michael Tapley, the Stage Manager was Terry Cranshaw and the Assistant Stage Manager was Amy Liljegren. The production was under the direction of Ken Ludwig with the following cast:

MEG.....Erin Dilly
LEO.....Brent Barrett
JACK.....Christopher Duva
AUDREY.....Lacey Kohl
DUNCAN.....Mark Jacoby
FLORENCE.....Jane Connell
DOC.....Dan Lauria
BUTCH.....Tim McGeever

CHARACTERS

Meg
Leo
Jack
Audrey
Duncan
Florence
Doc
Butch

SETTING

The play, essentially, has one set, and the majority of the action takes place in the large, handsome living room of the biggest house in York, Pennsylvania in 1958. The room has large French doors up right leading out to a garden. We can see the patio and shrubbery through the glass. Double doors down left lead to the vestibule, a hall and the front door. Double doors down right lead to the kitchen and additional rooms. There is a grand staircase that leads, at the top, to a bedroom door and a landing which leads off left. Under the staircase, up center, is an open doorway that leads to additional rooms. As we'll find out, all of these rooms are interconnected off stage. It's a grand house with a second staircase that we can't see.

Scene two of the first act is set in the Shrewsbury, Pa. Moose Lodge - an area of stage in front of a curtain.

Scene three of the first act is set inside a train, and all we see are two seats and an aisle.

This play is dedicated to my mother, Louise Ludwig, who was the kindest person I have ever known. And the most fun.

ACT I

Scene 1

(The handsome, spacious living room of a beautiful, well-appointed house in York, Pennsylvania in the spring of 1952. York is a quiet town in an area of gently rolling hills in southern Pennsylvania known as the Amish country. York was once, briefly, the capital of the Unites States, during the American Revolution, when the Articles of Confederation were kept here after Congress left Philadelphia under threat of invasion. So it's old country, proud country, settled by the English and the Germans, the latter bringing with them a plain-spoken, plain-dressed brand of religion that has been here ever since. The food here is rich and deep, the farmland outside town is magnificent and the people here have a great tradition of music. The point of all this is that York is filled with good, wise people, many of whom are happy to be just where they are — but some of whom would love to see the world just over the horizon. As the lights come up, MEG SNIDER, dressed to go out for the evening, ENTERS at the top of the stairs. She looks around and sees no one below; then she hurries down the stairs to the French doors that open out to the garden. As she makes the turn at the bottom corner of the banister, she swoops around in a grand arc, full of joy and anticipation. Our play is all about MEG, really, so we should take a very good look at her while we have the chance. She is a

local girl in her early 30s. She's vivacious, with enormous warmth and a great sense of humor. She also has the fresh, unstudied beauty that most women would kill for. MEG, however, is that second kind of Yorker. She knows there's a big world outside York, Pa., but she hasn't seen much of it yet. She harbors a world of dreams, and sleeps on them every night. They keep her alive, but she doesn't know it.)

MEG. Duncan? ... Duncan?!

DUNCAN. *(Off.)* Coming!

MEG. Oh, Duncan, please hurry up! It's 5:30! And it takes at least 45 minutes to get to Shrewsbury. And the show starts at seven!

(DUNCAN WOOLEY ENTERS, fixing his clerical collar. He's the local minister and substantially older than MEG. He's a good man at heart, but rather fussy, set in his ways, a bit scatterbrained, and lives in his own world.)

DUNCAN. Meg, I'm moving as fast as I can. I normally don't go out in the evenings. You know that. I can't get organized. I-I can't find things...

MEG. I'm sorry, Duncan, but —

DUNCAN. I hope you're not going to rush me after we get married.

MEG. Of course not, but I —

DUNCAN. It's not as if I don't want to get married. But I don't like rushing. It's almost... un-Christian the way you do it.

MEG. Is it? I'm sorry.

DUNCAN. Kiss kiss?

MEG. Kiss kiss. *(They kiss lightly.)* But Duncan, we can't be late for this!

DUNCAN. If you want the truth, I don't particularly want to go

anyway.

MEG. How can you say that?! It's Shakespeare! "Scenes from Shakespeare!" How often do we get a chance like this, living in York, Pennsylvania?

DUNCAN. Not very often, thank the Lord.

MEG. Duncan!

DUNCAN. Who's in this again?

MEG. It stars these two really wonderful actors from England. Leo Clark and Jack Gable. I saw them do a show like this in Philadelphia about two years ago. Don't you remember? I told you about it.

DUNCAN. Did you?

MEG. Oh, they were so wonderful! And to hear that language just... rolling over you in wave after wave. Oh. I think I love the theatre more than anything in the whole world.

DUNCAN. Nonsense.

MEG. I do!

DUNCAN. Meg. Theatre can be wonderful of course. At times. When it's something like the York County Bell-Ringers Annual Easter Pageant. Or The Messiah when they bring real sheep on stage. But there's something rather... troubling about professional theatre. The people in it are so... theatrical.

MEG. Duncan —

DUNCAN. So loose and flamboyant.

MEG. That's not how I —

DUNCAN. Now take these actors of yours. What are they called again?

MEG. Clark and Gable.

DUNCAN. Right.

MEG. They're fantastic.

DUNCAN. Meg, they're playing at the Shrewsbury Moose Lodge. They can't be that "fantastic."

MEG. Well they must have had an open date on their touring schedule, but —

DUNCAN. You know, the church has never looked very kindly upon play-going as a phenomenon, as a way of —

MEG. Duncan, please! Can we go now?! It's late! And you promised!

DUNCAN. All right, all right! I'll start the car.

(He starts to EXIT, then walks right back to MEG.)

DUNCAN. Problem.

MEG. What?

DUNCAN. Big problem.

MEG. What is it?

DUNCAN. We don't have a car.

MEG. What do you mean?

DUNCAN. *(Defensively.)* Well, I drove straight here from visiting some of my congregants, who are ill, and as I was getting out of the car, Mr. Morton walked by and told me that his car had broken down and he needed to buy groceries for his family — and take his wife to see her mother — and I said use my car, as long as you bring it back at the proper time.

MEG. So?

DUNCAN. I told him I didn't need it till eight. I just remembered.

MEG. Oh, Duncan!

DUNCAN, I'm sorry, my dear. It slipped my mind.

MEG. How could you do this?!

DUNCAN. I'm very sorry.

MEG. Now we'll miss it! I can't believe it! Oh damn!

DUNCAN. *(Scandalized.)* Meg!

MEG. Well I'm upset! I wanted to see Leo Clark!

DUNCAN. An actor.

MEG. Yes! Exactly!

DUNCAN. Now, now, we can still have fun. We can meet up with old friends and have dinner and chat. Ooh this could be good. I'll call the Kunkles. See if they're busy.

(He starts dialing.)

MEG. Duncan, the Kunkles are a hundred years old!

DUNCAN. Only Grandma Kunkle. And when she's awake, she's a riot. HELLO?! IS THAT GRANDMA KUNKLE?!!

MEG. Oh, Duncan ...

(MEG sighs with frustration and collapses on the sofa.)

Scene 2

(We hear a recording of a popular, upbeat song of the period and a raucous crowd having a good time. We're in an auditorium in Shrewsbury, Pennsylvania, that night. DOCTOR MYERS comes down the aisle, shaking hands with his friends and slapping their backs. He's the Chief Moose – a crusty, likeable curmudgeon, a country doctor who takes no guff from anybody. He wears the distinctive red fez of the Moose. He bounds onto the stage and starts the meeting.)

DOC MYERS. Ladies and Gentlemen... Ladies and Gentlemen! Thank you and welcome to the June, 1952 general meeting of the Loyal Order of the Moose, Shrewsbury Pennsylvania Lodge Num-

ber 84! Awhoo!!

("Awhoo" is the Sound of the Moose. When DOC MYERS does the call, the other Moose in the lodge call back to him.)

DOC MYERS. We hope you're having a heck of a good time tonight, and that you're all looking forward to the very special buffet spread we have waiting for you tonight across the hall — prepared exclusively by Pyemyers Pastries and Pigtrotters. Their motto is: "We go the whole hog and use the whole hog." Thank you, Carl Pyemyer and family. Now tonight I have the honor of presenting what you might call a "departure" from our usual monthly entertainment. In April we gave you "Hee Haw Hocum," a night of ferocious fiddling and hillbilly hilarity that as you'll remember raised the roof and brought the house down. Then in May, we saw the one and only "Mister Presto," whose amazing feats of prestidigatorial perfection brought us standing to our feet. *(Personally, I will never forget how he manipulated his eggs and made that sausage of his appear out of nowhere.)* Well folks, tonight we're plowing some new ground and bringing you some very special entertainment, entitled, believe it or not, "Scenes from Shakespeare" starring two actors who hail from London, England, coming to us direct from their last engagement at the Elks of Scranton, please give a Moose Lodge welcome to Leo Clark and Jack Gable! Awhoo!!

(Awhoo!! As DOC EXITS, the curtain flies, the lights change — and we're on a battlefield in England in the 1400s. Trumpets sound! Banners wave! We hear the sounds of war and we see a flimsy castle in the distance! These effects, unfortunately, are a bit down-at-heel. This is, after all, a tour of one-nighters, not the RSC. So the banners are a bit ragged, the music a bit tinny, and the one piece of scenery, the castle, can be folded for traveling.)

LEADING LADIES

(HENRY THE FIFTH, played by LEO CLARK, rushes on in full battle gear, waving his sword and rallying his troops. LEO is in his early 40s and has a British accent.)

KING HARRY.
Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more!
Or close the wall up with our English dead.
In peace there's nothing so becomes a man
As modest stillness and humility,
But when the blast of war blows in our ears,
Then imitate the action of the tiger!!

(HOTSPUR, HENRY's mighty nemesis, played by JACK GABLE, rushes on out of breath and fresh from fighting. Note: The boys have conflated two different plays here and I can only assure you that they're ashamed of it. Note also: "Ha!" denotes a thrust of the sword and its accompanying shout of valor.)

HOTSPUR. Hold up thy head, vile Scot! Thou art Harry Monmouth.

KING HARRY. And thou art Hotspur, the rebel lord who comes
To take my throne.

HOTSPUR. A plague on both your houses! Ha! Ha!

KING HARRY. Stay back I say!

HOTSPUR. I will not yield, for now is the winter of thy discontent!

KING HARRY.
And yet tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of
recorded time! Ha! Ha! Ha!

(They fight, furiously, a pitched battle of swords and bucklers. It is rather thrilling.)

HOTSPUR. A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!

(HARRY's final thrust skewers poor HOTSPUR.)

HOTSPUR. Oh, Harry, thou hast robbed me of my youth!

(HOTSPUR dies.)

KING HARRY... To be or not to be, that is the question.
Whether tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a ...

(LEO notices something in the audience. People are walking out, including one MOOSE named FRANK, who is clattering out of the second row and up the aisle. We can tell that FRANK is a MOOSE from the Fez he wears. [FRANK is doubled by the actor who plays BUTCH.] LEO has skipped a beat, but tries to go on, just a little louder.)

KING HARRY. Whether tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of where the hell are they going? They're walking out!

JACK. *(Opening an eye.)* They're heading to the buffet across the hall.

LEO. Hey! Hey! Come back here! What's the matter with you people! We are giving a performance up here!

MOOSE FRANK. *(From the aisle.)* It's boring! Go back where

you came from!

LEO. Oh, really?! Well why don't you go back where you came from?!! Huh?!

MOOSE FRANK. This is where I came from, you idiot. I live here!

LEO. "Idiot?" He called me an "idiot!"

JACK. Leo —

LEO. You're the idiot! You! That's right, you!

MOOSE FRANK. *(Pulling his coat off.)* Want to make something of it, buddy?!

LEO. *(Climbing off the stage.)* By God, I'll knock your block off!

JACK. *(Grabbing him.)* Leo! Leo, stop! STOP IT! *(To MOOSE FRANK:)* He's sorry. Go. Eat. Have a good time. Leo, let's go.

LEO. Ohhh, CRAP! Crap, crap, crap!!!

JACK. *(Shaking his head.)* "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow ...?"

LEO. *(Rounding on the audience again.)* What's the matter with you people?! Haven't you ever heard of culture?! Huh?! Or civilization?!!

JACK. Leo!

LEO. Next time we'll bring a stripper!

(From the back of the auditorium, the men cheer.)

MEN. *(Off.)* YAY!

(As the boys EXIT, the lights fade quickly and we hear the voice of a TRAIN CONDUCTOR.)

CONDUCTOR. All aboard! Pennsylvania Line, East Coast Local, stopping at Loganville, New Salem, York, Goldsboro, Harris-

burg and points North. Please watch your step entering the train. East Coast Local, all aboard!

Scene 3

(The lights come up inside an empty train car the next morning, as JACK and LEO ENTER carrying their suitcases.)

LEO. Morons! They were complete and utter morons!

JACK. Leo —

LEO. What ever happened to respect?! Hmm? And-and-and courtesy?! I mean, didn't they even look at our flyers?! I put them in the lobby. With our best reviews! "Mesmerizing."

JACK. The Mecklenberg Ledger.

LEO. "Fascinating."

JACK. The Beaver Falls Dispatch.

LEO. *(Glares at JACK.)* "A powerhouse night of theatre." The New York Times.

JACK. You made that one up.

LEO. Yes, I know, but it was on the flyer!

JACK. Leo, do you really want to do Shakespeare all your life?

LEO. Yes! I spent three years at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art.

JACK. You told me you went there to meet women.

LEO. I did, but then I got interested. God, just look at us! It's been ten years and we're still at the bottom. Rock bottom! I can feel my arse scraping on the little stones ...

JACK. Do you know what I want? I mean really want? *(He's deadly serious now.)* Neighbors. A house. People who care if I open

the front door in the morning.

LEO. Well... of course... But Jack we can still make it! As actors! All we need is a break! *(Suddenly galvanized, turning on a dime.)* And we're in luck. Finally! This morning I read in Variety that MGM is doing a movie version of Julius Caesar. In Los Angeles. They have James Mason as Brutus, John Gielgud as Cassius, and they're looking for more Shakespearean actors. This is made for us. I mean, how many Shakespearean actors do they have in America? Six? Now, how much do we have in the kitty? For the flight — as of right now?

JACK. Leo, we can't afford it.

LEO. Don't be negative! Just tell me. How much have we saved?

JACK. You don't want to know.

LEO. A thousand? Eight hundred. Six. Five? How much?!

JACK. Nothing.

LEO. No really.

JACK. We don't have a dime.

LEO. *(In shock.)* But — but — what about last night? Our show for the moose people?

JACK. They wouldn't pay us.

LEO. What?!

JACK. I went right up to the Great Yak. He said six of his members resigned at the buffet. One more soliloquy, he would have lost the herd.

LEO. Those... cheaters! Those-those-those crooks.

JACK. Maybe we should do a whole play next time, like we used to.

LEO. Oh, oh, oh that's a great idea! Except we have no actors, it's just the two of us! We have seven costumes! From different plays! In a pinch we could put on "One Gentleman of Verona!" "The Taming of the Merry Wife of Windsor!"

JACK. All right, all right...

LEO. "Much Ado About Hamlet!"

JACK. All right!

LEO. I just... I... I mean it's... it's just...

(He's in despair. Real despair. JACK feels awful for him.)

JACK. Would you like some breakfast? Maybe they have a café car.

LEO. *(Bitterly.)* We can't afford it. Remember?

JACK. I lied. I have a dollar left. It's on me.

(JACK EXITS. LEO is alone and despondent. After a moment, he notices a local newspaper on the train seat across the aisle. The York Dispatch. He picks it up and glances at the front page. Then something catches his eye and he reads more carefully. The more he reads, the more absorbed he becomes. The story continues on the inside, and when he opens the paper, we see the headline on the front page: "Oh Max, Oh Steve!" JACK re-ENTERS.)

JACK. I can't believe it! They want a dollar-fifty for two eggs!

LEO. Jack, take a look at this.

JACK. It's highway robbery!

LEO. It's important. Look. "Oh Max, Oh Steve." "Dying Woman Seeks Loved Ones. Large Fortune At Stake." Listen! "Millionairess Florence Snider of York, Pennsylvania, is reported to be searching desperately for her sister's children, Max and Steve, to whom she intends to leave the bulk of her fortune."

JACK. I think I have some extra change some place ...

LEO. "Miss Snider last saw Max and Steve when, as children, they sailed for England with their mother. She corresponded for a time, but then lost all contact —"

JACK. Would you get to the point, I'm hungry!

LEO. The boys went to England. They left here as children. Listen: "Repeated telegrams and advertisements in America and England have failed to get a response." She can't find them! And apart from a niece named... Meg who lives with her in York, she wants to leave them her money.

JACK. So what?

LEO. So what?! Jack, what are we? You and I. Are we Polish?

JACK. No.

LEO. Hungarian?

JACK. No.

LEO. Lithuanian?

JACK. No.

LEO. We're English! We have English accents! And look at us! We could be brothers. We even look alike. *(He holds JACK around the shoulders and they look out at the audience. They look nothing at all alike, of course.)* You could be Steve and I could be Max.

JACK. Us? Her nephews?

LEO. Bingo.

JACK. But we're not her nephews. It's a lie.

LEO. Not necessarily. Do you know all your relations?

JACK. Oh, stop it. I can't pretend to be somebody else. Besides which, it's illegal. They could put us in jail!

LEO. Jack, Florence Snider has tried for months to reach her nephews and she can't find them. So we wouldn't be hurting anybody. Do you think that I would hurt anybody?

JACK. What about the niece? Meg.

LEO. The hell with her. She'll get plenty. Look, it says the estate is estimated at three million dollars. So instead of three million, she gets one million. And you get a million and I get a million.

JACK. A million dollars?

LEO. *(Emotionally.)* We could start over. Try again... from the

beginning... become something...

JACK. Leo ...

LEO. Jack, please.

JACK. But she could have seen pictures of her nephews! In the past couple of months!

LEO. I've thought of that, so we don't show up until she kicks the bucket.

JACK. Dead?

LEO. No, Jack, a little wooden bucket that she kicks on its side ... Yes of course dead! We wait nearby and keep our ears to the ground. The minute she goes, we send a telegram.

JACK. It won't work.

LEO. Yes it will.

JACK. No it won't! We don't know anything about Max and Steve! How old they are. When they left. Their mother's name. Their father's name. We'd have to know somebody from York, Pennsylvania!

(At this moment, AUDREY skates in on roller skates. She's wearing a brightly colored uniform with a matching hat. She also carries some text books and a towel. She's about 20, extremely well-built and extremely sweet and good-natured. She's a knockout.)

AUDREY. Wheeee!

(As she skates in, she can't stop herself and careens right into JACK, who catches her.)

AUDREY. Oh, thanks! *(For JACK, it's love at first sight.)* Hi. I bet you're wondering why I'm dressed up like this.

JACK. It's very cheerful.

AUDREY. It's my first day at the Tastee Bite. See? "Tastee Bite."

(She points to her chest, and her tight sweater has the words "Tastee Bite" across the front.)

LEO. The first E gets a bit lost in the middle.

AUDREY. I took the training course yesterday and I passed with flying colors. They said I had the best potential of anybody they interviewed since they opened their doors to the public!

JACK. When did they open?

AUDREY. Monday.

JACK. Good show.

AUDREY. They have faith in me and that counts for a lot. Right?

LEO. Absolutely.

AUDREY. To tell you the truth, I got the job just to make some money. I want to go to college. Ergo, the books. Ergo means therefore. I mean, I know it's a commute and all, living in York, but I figure it's worth it if it helps get me through college.

LEO. ... You live in York?

AUDREY. Yeah.

LEO. York, Pennsylvania?

AUDREY. Yeah.

LEO. You wouldn't know a Miss Florence Snider by any chance?

AUDREY. Are you kidding me? When I worked for a doctor, she came to the office like every day.

LEO. Do you know when she last saw "Max" and "Steve?"

AUDREY. 1920.

LEO. How old they were?

AUDREY. Six and four.

LEO. Their mother's name?

AUDREY. Jennie.

LEO. Father's?

AUDREY. Irv.

LEO. Yes!

JACK. Oh, no.

AUDREY. I remember when she used to come to the office, everything with her was a big deal. If she had a headache, it was a migraine, she had a slight fever, she was burning up. She was always exaggerating.

LEO. And how's she doing?

AUDREY. She's dead. She died this morning.

JACK. Oh, crap!

AUDREY. I know. It's awful.

LEO. What about Max and Steve? Has anyone heard from them?

AUDREY. Nope, not a word. The funny thing is, she didn't even have a picture of them. I asked her. She was real broken up about it. She said she thought that the older one, that was Max, she thought that Max was in the theatre.

LEO. In the theatre ...!

JACK. Oh, God..

LEO. Ha! Fate! Providence! "If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all!"

AUDREY. Yeah. ... Anyway, I feel bad for her. I found her very congenial. That means nice. One day she comes in and I'm helping her up the stairs and she says "I'm gonna remember you in my will," and I say, "Do it with money" — teasing her, you know? And she says "You should live so long," which I thought was nice, her wanting me to live a long time.

LEO. Is there anything else she ever said about Max and Steve? Anything distinctive about them? A scar, a limp ...

AUDREY. Nope. Not really. Just average normal people. She said that Steve was deaf and dumb, but that's about all.

LEO. Deaf and dumb?

AUDREY. Yeah. It's congenital. Not to be confused with congenial. Can I leave my stuff here? I gotta practice my skating. See, to work at this place you've got to roller skate from table to table. I still need some practice, but I've got a plan. The aisles. See? They're nice and straight. And they're numerous, which means there's a lot of them, and they're contiguous, which means that one comes right after the other in a straight line, like two worms sucking each other's lips. My name's Audrey.

JACK. Jack. Jack Gable. Like Clark Gable without the cleft in the chin.

AUDREY. Hey, You're cute. I'll see ya later!

(She skates off.)

JACK. She thinks I'm cute ...

LEO. Fine, you're cute. And you'll be deaf and dumb and I'll do all the talking.

JACK. Oh, stop it.

LEO. Why not? It's perfect!

JACK. I can't be deaf and dumb, I-I-I don't know any sign language.

LEO. So you'll make it up! It's easy!

JACK. It is not!

LEO. Of course it is! Try it! Just try it! Say... "yes." *(Reluctantly, Jack hold his hands out facing each other, fingers up and extended, the hands parallel.)* Say "no." *(JACK crosses his hands.)* "Maybe." *(Wavy hand.)* "I'm hungry." *(Points to his mouth with his tongue out.)* "I'm thirsty." *(Swigs, using his thumb as a bottle.)* "I have an idea." *(Finger up with a big smile.)* All right, good. *(Still signing, Jack gives a silent thumbs up.)* Stop it. *(JACK signs "stop it" by putting his palms face down and tossing them to the sides, the*

way an umpire indicates "safe" in baseball.) Stop doing that, Jack. *(JACK does the "stop it" sign and points to himself.)* It isn't funny!

(JACK does the "stop it" sign, then imitates laughing.)

JACK. Oh. Sorry. I'm sure it's not real sign language.

LEO. We'll tell them it's a new system. Signing for the simple. We'll say you can't hear a thing. You read lips, but only mine. Now the problem is that Audrey lives in York and she heard you talking just now. So you'll have to wear a beard or something to play Steve. So she doesn't recognize you.

JACK. I look terrible in a beard!

LEO. That's not the point! Now what have we got?

(He rummages through JACK's costume bag and pulls out a beard.)

LEO. Try this.

JACK. No.

LEO. Just try it!

JACK. It looks fake.

(JACK tries on the beard.)

LEO. Try it with this hat. *(LEO pulls out JACK's Polonius head-covering and JACK pulls it on.)* That's better. Now what about these glasses. *(LEO pulls out a pair of glasses and JACK puts them on.)* Good.

(At which moment, AUDREY skates back in. JACK is petrified; LEO recovers quickly.)

AUDREY. *(Off, then on.)* Whee! Hi. Sorry. I forgot my towel

... *(She sees JACK and is startled.)* Hey! Did he have a beard just now?

LEO. Who? Him? I-I don't think you've met him.

AUDREY. I haven't?

LEO. No. Oh, oh, of course. You met Jack, an old friend. This is my brother Steve.

AUDREY. "Steve?" No kidding. Hi. How are ya?

LEO. I'm afraid he can't hear what you're saying. He's deaf and dumb.

AUDREY. Deaf and d -! Holy cow! That's incredible! Usually I never even hear about anybody being deaf and dumb, now it comes up twice. Talk about a coincidence!

LEO. Ah, but is it? You see, this is Steve. And I'm his brother.

AUDREY. I know. It's amazing. Two deaf people named Steve.

LEO. Two...?

AUDREY. Yeah. Don't you remember? Max and Steve. The two girls we talked about. Like I told you, the younger one is deaf and dumb.

LEO. "Two girls?"

AUDREY. Yeah.

LEO. But ... Max and Steve are men, aren't they?

AUDREY. No. Oh oh oh! I get it! I bet you got mixed up because of their names, right? But they're not men, they're girls! Their real names are Maxine and Stephanie.

JACK. "Maxine and Stephanie?" Oh that's great, that is just great!

AUDREY. Hey, he just talked.

LEO. Amazing are you absolutely sure they're girls?

AUDREY. Sure. I talked to Miss Snider like a hundred times about them.

LEO. It didn't say they were girls in the paper.

AUDREY. I'll bet you just missed it. Most people don't read

carefully.

JACK. Quite right, here it is. It says girls. Right here. Look. "Girls!"

AUDREY. You know, he talks very well for a beginner. Well, if you'll excuse me, I'm gonna go practice my skating. *(TO JACK.)* CONGRATULATIONS. YOU'RE MAKING TERRIFIC PROGRESS.

JACK. Thank you.

(She skates away.)

LEO. God damn it, God damn it! We were so close! I could taste it! With two million dollars, we could have made our own Shakespeare movie!

JACK. At least I can talk now.

LEO. GOOOODDDDAAMMMITT! *(In a rage, LEO throws one of the suitcases on the floor — and it springs open, sending costumes spilling everywhere.)* Oh, great. Just look at this. Costumes, to remind me of our latest defeat.

JACK. I'll help, I'll help. *(As they begin gathering up the costumes, LEO holds up a wig and a dress and looks at them quizzically. Meanwhile, JACK is holding a gown up to himself.)* Ha. Remember this one? Juliet. We had that knockout actress and I used to say, "Pardon me, but would you like to climb up my balcony ...?" Ha. And look at this. The Taming of the Shrew. "If I be waspish, best beware my sting."

(He holds the dress in front of him and models it, chuckling. Then he notices LEO. LEO's mind is grinding away. He's getting a maniacal look in his eyes. He stares at the dress in his own hands, then looks back at JACK.)

LEO. "If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now —"

JACK. No.

LEO. Yes.

JACK. No!

LEO. We can do it! It'll work! I'll be Maxine, you'll be Stephanie.

JACK. Wrong! I will not dress up as a woman. Ever. I don't do that.

LEO. For a million dollars? The question is, which dress do you wear.

(LEO starts rummaging through the suitcase, tossing costumes in all directions.)

JACK. NO. HEY. WOULD YOU STOP IT?! HEY CUT THAT OUT! RIGHT NOW! JUST STOP IT!

LEO. Ooh, ooh, ooh, I think I'd look good in this one. Cleopatra, Queen of the Nile.

JACK. You'd look ridiculous!

LEO. Now what about you ...?

JACK. I am not doing this. Do you hear me? ARE YOU LISTENING?!

LEO. What about this? It has a plunging neckline —

JACK. They wouldn't believe me! I'm not a good actor!

LEO. You get very good reviews.

JACK. BECAUSE YOU WRITE THEM!

LEO. *(Holding up a diaphanous number.)* Ooh, ooh, ooh, look at this. It's perfect. Titania, Queen of the Fairies.

JACK. I can't wear that! It has wings on it!

LEO. We'll cut them off.

JACK. No!

LEO. Jack, don't you remember the good old days. We said we could do anything. And we believed it! You played Richard the Third with that big hump on your back, and you hobbled around the stage like some deranged homunculus. You played Romeo and bounded gracefully onto Juliet's balcony. You brought the house down.

JACK. I brought the balcony down.

LEO. Just that one night.

JACK. But Leo, those were all men! I can't play a woman!

LEO. Why not?

JACK. Because I'm a chap, a bloke, a guy!

LEO. Jack!Who do you think played the women's roles in Shakespeare's time? Huh?

JACK. Chaps?

LEO. Exactly. And how did they do it?

JACK. Small brassieres?

LEO. They did it with conviction. With sheer talent. Because they were actors, like you and me. And if this works, we can be successful actors. We can start over. Go to Los Angeles. Get another chance. Jack, it's the role of lifetime. Will you meet the challenge? Will you rise to the occasion? Will you fulfill your destiny and save your best friend from a life of crushing disappointment and defeat? Yes or no?!

JACK. NO!

LEO. I'll take that as a yes. Now we'll get off at the next stop, send them a telegram, get into our costumes, get back on the train and then it's on to York, Pennsylvania! Ha ha!

(Blackout.)

Scene 4

(We hear a telephone ring and the lights come up on DUNCAN and MEG, in separate places, on the phone with each other. MEG has placed the call and DUNCAN is answering it. MEG is bright-eyed with excitement, and can't wait to tell DUNCAN her news.)

DUNCAN. Hello. Evangelical United Bretheren Church of York. Reverend Wooley speaking.

MEG. Duncan, it's me! Guess what?! A telegram just arrived and guess who it's from. And don't say Grandma Kunkle.

DUNCAN. Winston Churchill.

MEG. Wrong. It's from Max and Steve!

DUNCAN. Max and Steve?

MEG. Yes! Isn't it wonderful! I have cousins! They arrive today at 5:30. And I've never even met them. Isn't it exciting?!

DUNCAN. Yes it is, my goodness, but... You do realize this means you'll have to split your inheritance.

MEG. Well of course.

DUNCAN. Instead of three million, you'll only get one million.

MEG. A million dollars is enough for ten lifetimes. And you always say yourself that money isn't important.

DUNCAN. Well it isn't. Per se. But one can do so much good with three million dollars. I could set up a foundation. And run it from a nice new office. I'd interview charities that ask me for grant money. They'd take me to lunch and try to woo me ...

MEG. Or we could give it all away in one big lump and just go on living the way things are.

DUNCAN. Now that's ridiculous! It would be vain and boastful.

MEG. Oh, Duncan. You were counting on all three million,

weren't you.

DUNCAN. Yes, I was. But not for myself. For the foundation.

MEG. And for that little house on Nantucket.

DUNCAN. Well we'd have to run it out of some place.

MEG. They arrive on the six o'clock train.

DUNCAN. Very fortuitous, their arriving this week. And then one has to ask if it's entirely by chance.

MEG. What do you mean?

DUNCAN. Have you ever thought that they might be frauds.

MEG. Oh, stop it.

DUNCAN. Why not? I mean it's a very convenient time to arrive. They will get two million dollars.

MEG. Would you please forget about the money.

DUNCAN. I am not thinking about the money! I told you that. But maybe they're not

BOTH. as Christian as we are.

MEG. Duncan, you're becoming awfully intolerant.

DUNCAN. Nonsense.

MEG. You know what God thinks of intolerant people.

DUNCAN. Meg —

MEG. One minute you're brushing your teeth, then whammo, you're a pillar of salt.

DUNCAN. Meg!

MEG. With greedy people it's even worse.

DUNCAN. I am not greedy! ... Look. We'll all be very happy to meet your cousins. That's all that matters.

MEG. You will be here when they arrive, won't you? I want to meet them on the platform.

DUNCAN. I'll try. But we have a Boy Scout meeting here at five and I'm handing out the merit badges. It's very exciting. One of the boys is making Eagle, and we have two Hawks and a Pigeon, so I'd better go now and get ready.

MEG. All right, see you later.
DUNCAN. Kiss kiss.

(They hang up.)

Scene 5

(The actions shifts to the living room of FLORENCE Snider's house, a half hour later. DOCTOR MEYERS and his son BUTCH are hanging a banner that reads: "Welcome Max and Steve." Butch, early 20s, is a little slow on the uptake, but earnest and sincere, with a good heart. He played football in high school. DOC and Butch argue a lot and adore each other.)

DOC. Butch, I want you to listen to me and keep an open mind! All right?! Are we clear on this?!

BUTCH. Yes, Father.

DOC. The point I'm making is: It's just as easy to go to bed with a rich girl as it

BOTH. *(Simultaneously.)* is a poor one.

BUTCH. Father!

DOC. The two women coming off that train will be rich as Croesus. Marry one and you'll be set for life.

BUTCH. But I'm in love with Audrey!

DOC. Butch! Sow your oats, by all means. Plow the field, till the soil, water the fruit, but marry for cash.

BUTCH. Oh, Father ...

DOC. Look at me, Butch. I'm not joking! I married for love. Biggest mistake I ever made in my whole life. You could have had

Meg, for God's sake! Before she got engaged to our anal-retentive minister.

BUTCH. Father, Meg is my best friend!

DOC. People do stay friends after they're married, Butch. I read about them in a book once!

(MEG ENTERS, hurrying down the stairs and DOC stomps off to the other side of the room. MEG has smartened up for the arrival of her cousins and wears a twin set.)

BUTCH. Hey, Meg.

MEG. What's eating him?

BUTCH. He doesn't like Audrey. He thinks I should marry a girl with deeper pockets, like one of your cousins coming off the train.

(MEG sighs. Here we go again.)

MEG. Butch, are you in love with Audrey?
BUTCH. I think so.
MEG. How does she make you feel?
BUTCH. Happy.
MEG. And how do you make her feel?
BUTCH. Happy.
MEG. And what do you want to do about it?
BUTCH. Sleep with her.
MEG. What else do you want to do about it?
BUTCH. Marry her.
MEG. Well what are you waiting for, a comet?!

(DUNCAN ENTERS from the front hall.)

DUNCAN. Well, well, well. Greetings all.

DOC. Well look who's here. It's the Reverend Do-gooder.

DUNCAN. And good afternoon to you, Doctor Death. Killed any patients yet today?

DOC. No, but I did enjoy your sermon on Sunday. Best sleep I've had in weeks. Awhooo!

(The call of the MOOSE.)

MEG. Would you two stop it. Duncan, we've got to hurry. We're going to be late.

DUNCAN. You're rushing me again, my dear. Now please. Nothing profits from haste.

MEG. Yes, Duncan, but did I tell you that Maxine is in the theatre? She's an actress!

DUNCAN. Yes, you did, though personally I can't imagine why anyone would voluntarily put on a silly costume, stand up in front of a lot of people and pontificate about something that most of the audience has absolutely no interest in.

BUTCH... You're a minister. Don't you do that?

MEG. Wait. Oh, no. I forgot the flowers. Oh, darn it! I'll be right back!

(She dashes up the stairs and disappears into her room.)

DUNCAN. Haste, haste ...

DOC & DUNCAN. Nothing profits from haste.

DOC. You told us that, you jackass.

(At this moment, AUDREY hurries in from the garden, wild with excitement.)

AUDREY. Hey! Hey! Everybody, guess what, guess what?!

BUTCH. Hey, Audrey. How was your first day?

AUDREY. Great, Butch, thanks, but listen —

BUTCH. I love you with roller skates. They really set off your eyes.

AUDREY. Thanks, now listen! Guess who's coming?!

BUTCH. Maxine and Stephanie.

AUDREY. How did you know?

DOC. We got a telegram this afternoon.

DUNCAN. They're due any time now.

AUDREY. "Due any time?" They're outside!! I just met 'em and they're comin' up the path!! And let me tell you, English girls are a whole other thing. These are not your ordinary women. I'll bring 'em in! *(Calling.)* Hey! This way! Come on, don't be shy.

(LEO and JACK ENTER, dressed as women. LEO wears the dress of Cleopatra of the Nile. JACK's Titania dress still has wings on it. LEO, as MAXINE, is chic and flamboyant. JACK, as STEPHANIE, is shy and demure. BUTCH, DUNCAN and DOC stare gaping at them, their mouths hanging open. AUDREY looks proud. Of course, whenever LEO speaks as MAXINE, he uses a feminine, high-pitched voice.)

LEO. Hello, hello, hello, my darlings! Oh! How wonderful to arrive at long last into the bosom of my own dear family. "Oh! This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this York, P-A."

(LEO beams. JACK looks terrified.)

BUTCH. Are you really Maxine and Stephanie?

LEO. No, I'm just Maxine. This is Stephanie. *(He holds JACK's fingers to his lips.)* Stephanie, say hello to the nice people.

(JACK bows upstage in both directions, giving us a clear view of the back of his dress — which still has two fairy wings sticking out. At this moment, MEG hurries down the stairs, carrying flowers.)

MEG. Oh, I'm sorry! I'm sorry I'm late, I'm AH! *(The sight of them startles her. To AUDREY:)* Is this ...? *(Audrey nods.)*... Here. These flowers are for you. I'm your cousin Margaret.

(LEO stops dead. He's dumbstruck. She's the most beautiful girl he's ever seen.)

LEO. How... how... how do you do? Auntie Florence never told us you were so... beautiful.

(LEO stares at her, unable to move. MEG wants to embrace them, but hesitates... then, with a cry of happiness, she gives in to her affectionate nature and gives them each a hug. The very touch of her makes LEO dizzy.)

MEG. Oh, I am so happy to meet you! Let me introduce you to my friends. This is our Pastor, Reverend Wooley.

DUNCAN. How do you do.'

LEO. Ah, I see that you're a man of the cloth. I find that so inspiring, so je ne sais quoi. Do you speak French?

DUNCAN. No.

LEO. Anyone? *(Everyone murmurs no.)* Ah, que jamais tout de suite à Sorbonne à la frommage et bon soir. Next.

MEG. This is Doctor Meyers, who has taken such wonderful care of Aunt Florence.

LEO. How good of you to bother.

DOC. If you ever need an operation, just call me. I do plastic surgery on the side.

LEO. But I don't need it on my side, it's my face that ... Oh, ha! Next.

MEG. This is Butch. And Audrey.

BUTCH. She's my girlfriend. We're going to be married soon!

DOC. Over my dead body.

LEO. And wouldn't that make an unusual ceremony. "Do you take this woman, standing on this dead body, to be your ... Ha!"

AUDREY. *(Putting JACK's fingers to her lips.)* WELCOME TO OUR METROPOLIS! THAT MEANS CITY!

(JACK hugs her warmly, rocking back and forth.)

AUDREY. Aww ...

LEO. How sweet. *(JACK does it again.)* Such an affectionate little thing... *(Again.)* That's enough!... Now could you possibly take us to see dear Auntie Florence?

MEG. Well ...

LEO. What? Oh, no! I can see it in your face. We aren't too late, are we?

MEG. Maxine ...

LEO. Oh, no, no, no!

MEG. Maxine ...

LEO. I can't believe it! After all this time! Stephanie! Stephanie, listen to me! *(Fingers to lips.)* We're too late! Auntie Florence is dead!

(JACK opens his mouth and screams in complete silence. He looks like Edvard Munch's "The Scream," but rocking back and forth, arms up.)

MEG. Maxine! You're not too late! She isn't dead!

(LEO and JACK stop cold. They look at each other in horror.)

LEO... Not dead?
MEG. No. She's hanging on. And she wants to see you.
LEO. But-but-but-
AUDREY. Butch, this morning you told me she was dead!
BUTCH. That's what Father said.
DOC. She had no pulse! Then she got better! What do you want from me?!

(LEO and JACK start sneaking away.)

MEG. Maxine? Where are you going?
LEO. The news. It's overwhelming. We thought a little stroll might help us recover ...

(A voice from off stage is heard, and LEO and JACK freeze.)

FLORENCE. *(Off.)* Are they here?! Where are they?! I want to see them!

(AUNT FLORENCE ENTERS. She's very old, extremely crusty, and her eyesight is terrible.)

MEG. Aunt Florence! You should be in bed!
FLORENCE. *(All sweetness.)* Don't be ridiculous. I have two little nieces to meet. Where are they? ... *(Tough and angry!)* WHERE ARE THEY?!
MEG. Right over here.
FLORENCE. Maxine? Stephanie?

LEO. Yes?

(She scrutinizes them; a tense moment.)

FLORENCE. *(Crying.)*...They're so beautiful! Maxine, my darling, it's really you...

LEO. Auntie Florence, dear Auntie Florence... You look so wealthy... healthy! So rich in color. So loaded with charm. "Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety."

FLORENCE. That must be Stephanie.

LEO. No, it's Shakespeare. Wait. Stephanie doesn't know yet. She thinks you're dead. *(Fingers to lips.)* Stephanie. Brace yourself. This is your Auntie Florence.

(JACK does another toreador flourish. Then he does some signing that clearly says "Let's get the hell out of here.")

LEO. Yes, I agree.As soon as possible. She says it can't be Auntie Florence, you look so young.

FLORENCE. Oh, the sweet baby!

(She pulls Jack fiercely to her bosom.)

DOC. Florence, you should be in bed.

FLORENCE. Oh be quiet, murderer. You said I was dead. I could have been buried alive.

DOC. I made a mistake. It happens. You don't make mistakes?

FLORENCE. Not like that I don't.

DOC. What about your stock tips? Huh?! They all stunk!

FLORENCE. That's different! They don't kill people!

DOC. They all went straight down the toilet!

FLORENCE. IT'S NOT THE SAME THING!

(And with that, AUNT FLORENCE grabs her chest and starts to gasp.)

FLORENCE. Argh!

MEG. Aunt Florence!

FLORENCE. Argh!

BUTCH. I've got her! I've got her!

AUDREY. Florence!

DOC. Oh, damn. Get her inside.

MEG. Maxine, we'll be right back. She should be fine, don't worry.

LEO. Can I help?

MEG. No, it's okay, really. We put a bedroom on the ground floor. I'll be right back!

(Everyone helps FLORENCE off, leaving LEO and JACK alone.)

JACK. All right, now let's get the hell out of here!

LEO. Wait. Wait. Wait! Not yet! I think we should stay.

JACK. Stay? Are you crazy?!

LEO. Jack, this whole thing could still work. I mean, why not?

JACK. Because she's still alive. And she's really mean!

LEO. But she can't last much longer. She must be a thousand years old.

JACK. She could linger. Old people do that, they linger out of spite.

LEO. I say we give it a couple of weeks.

JACK. A couple of weeks?!

LEO. Shh!

JACK. Are you crazy?! Look at me! I have wings on! I feel like I'm in "Charley's Aunt Meets the Fairy Queen!" And where the hell

did this "Maxine" creature come from?!

LEO. *(Worried.)* I have no idea.

JACK. She's from another planet. She's possessing you. It's like "The Invasion of the Body Snatchers!"

LEO. Look, how about this. We take it a day at a time. We spend the night, and if they get suspicious, we reconsider.

JACK. No.

LEO. It's worth it, Jack.

JACK. No!

LEO. Two million dollars!

JACK. No!

LEO. Jack! *(MEG REENTERS.)* be nimble, Jack be quick, Jack jump over Hello, you're back, you're back!

MEG. Am I interrupting?

LEO. No, no, no, no, no, no! You're just in time. *(Hand to lips:)* Yes, Stephanie, of course you can take a stroll. Why don't you get one of those train schedules from the station. Then we'll know what time the little trainies leave from here to go to other places. It might come in handy if we're ever in a hurry. Who knows?

(LEO laughs gaily. JACK signs "All right, but I don't like it!" and EXITS.)

LEO. Now how is dear Auntie Florence doing?

MEG. I'm afraid it doesn't look very good. It's been like this for months. But at least you made it before anything happened. She got to see you after all these years. That means a great deal to all of us.

LEO. Thank you.

MEG. But ... oh I don't know how to put this... could you tell me just one thing? About yourself.

LEO. *(Worried.)* Yes, I-I suppose so ...

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