

LEADING LADIES

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.)

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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?

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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!

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(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

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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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MEG. It doesn't really matter at all, and I don't mean to pry.

LEO. No, please. Go ahead.

MEG. Well... is it true that you're really... in the theatre?

LEO. The thea... Oh, oh, oh yes! Yes, I am. Absolutely.

MEG. Oh, I think that's so wonderful! My happiest memory in the world is when my father took me to Philadelphia to see my first Shakespeare. It was Twelfth Night, my favorite.

LEO. (*Stunned.*)... My senior project at the Royal Academy was Twelfth Night.

MEG. The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art? In London? Oh God, you're my hero!

LEO. I am?

MEG. Can I tell you a secret? If I could do anything in the whole world, I mean if somehow things changed like magic, overnight, all I'd ever want to do is be an actress. I'd want to recite Shakespeare every night and let those words just tumble out of me like a waterfall. I'd want to play Rosalind and Juliet and Cleopatra. Do you specialize in anything?

LEO. Specialize?

MEG. You know, comedy, tragedy ...?

LEO. Oh, I do a bit of everything. Comedy. Tragedy. Comical-tragedy. "Tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene individual or poem unlimited." I did a Command Performance of Twelfth Night not long ago for the Queen of England.

MEG. What did you play?

LEO. The Duke Orsino! ... 'sssss lady love, the fair Olivia.

MEG. Oh my God, I'd give anything to have seen you in it. Do some for me. Would you? Just a little?

LEO. Now?

MEG. Yes!

LEO. Oh I couldn't.

MEG. Please!

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LEO. You embarrass me.

MEG. A few lines. Please! I know it all by heart. I'll do Viola's lines. She's my favorite character in all the plays. "What I am, and what I would, are as secret as maidenhead: to your ears, divinity, to any other's profanation. Good madam, let me see your face."

(Note: this is one of the sexiest and most romantic passages in all of Shakespeare. LEO plays Olivia to the hilt. He's a grande dame, vain and resplendent. The tone shifts at MEG's speech "With adorations, with fertile tears," and from that point on, the tone is lushly romantic.)

LEO. "Have you any commission from your lord to negotiate with my face? You are now out of your text. But we will draw the curtain and show you the picture." *(She unveils and shows her face.)* "Look you, sir. Is't not well done?"

MEG. "Excellently done, if God did all."

LEO. "'Tis in grain, sir, 'twill endure wind and weather."

MEG. O, if I did love you in my master's flame,
With such a suff'ring, such a deadly life,
In your denial I would find no sense,
I would not understand it."

LEO. "Why, what would you?"

MEG. "Make me a willow cabin at your gate
And call upon my soul within the house,
Write loyal cantons of contemnèd love,
And sing them loud even in the dead of night;
Halloo your name to the reverberate hills,
And make the babbling gossip of the air
Cry out "Olivia!"

(Silence. LEO is so smitten he can barely speak.)

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LEO. ... We should get married.

MEG. What?

LEO. You. You should get married. Are you married?

MEG. No, I'm not.

LEO. Oh good! Isn't that splendid.

MEG. But I'm getting married next month.

(LEO turns white and he almost falls.)

LEO. What? You are? Next month?

MEG. That's right.

LEO. But-but-but you haven't met me yet!

MEG. I'm sorry?

LEO. Met-met-met-me. To met-me. It's an Old English expression. It means to live life to the fullest. From the French, metmoyer. And who exactly is the lucky man?

MEG. You met him just now. Duncan. Reverend Wooley.

LEO. Him? Reverend Woo — But-but my dear, you... you don't have an engagement ring.

MEG. Duncan says that rings are earthly symbols of material wealth.

LEO. You mean he's cheap. And where's the honeymoon?

MEG. He doesn't believe in honeymoons, either. But can I tell you a secret? Some day I want to go to Paris.

LEO. Well of course you do. And you should want to. But are you in love with Reverend Whosits?

MEG. *(Taken aback.)* Wooley. Yes, of course I am. You see, he was friends with my mother and father, here in York, and they passed away when I was young. And he was very kind when they died, and helped me get through it. And so it means a lot to me. That we can talk about them.

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LEO. Ah.

MEG. I think that's what love is, don't you? Having something you can share, then letting it grow.

LEO. No, no, no, no, no! My dear, love is lightning. It makes you ache and cry and laugh and scream. It lingers your desire and makes you count the minutes till your wedding night so that your heart stops beating with the anticipation of it.

MEG. *(In awe.)*... Have you ever been in love like that?

LEO. Oh, yes... But what am I saying? I'm interfering and I shouldn't. I wish you every happiness in the world with that man. Duncan. Reverend Woolsack.

MEG. Thank you. You will be here for the wedding, won't you? Oh please say yes! It's three weeks from Sunday.

LEO. Well, I'm afraid that all depends. I may have to... meet someone in New York. A very dear friend of mine. Leo Clark. One of the greatest actors in the English-speaking world. I'm sure you've heard of him.

MEG. Yes, I have!

LEO. You have?

MEG. I saw him about two years ago in Philadelphia doing Scenes from Shakespeare. He was wonderful! I fell in love with him! Is he your boyfriend?

LEO. Hm? No. No! Not at all. We're just very close. Inseparable, you might say.

MEG. This is so amazing. I was supposed to go see him last night. In Shrewsbury. Which is only 20 miles from here. In fact, you could go visit him right now, unless... Maxine?... Hello?

(But MAXINE is lost in thought.)

LEO. I wonder...

MEG. What?

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LEO. Shh! Don't interrupt. *(Silence.)*... I am getting the most marvelous idea. Margaret, what if Leo Clark came here to meet you ... and the two of you put on a performance of Shakespeare, together.

MEG. ... You're teasing me.

LEO. I am not, now listen. You get married in just three and a half weeks. Right? So, in honor of your wedding, we plan a special event to make it truly unforgettable: a scene from Shakespeare — no! a whole play — Twelfth Night — starring you and Leo Clark.

MEG. You are teasing me!

LEO. No I am not! Look, Leo is close by. You are my cousin. And I would love the two of you to spend some time together ...

MEG. Well first of all, he wouldn't do it.

LEO. Of course he would! He's devoted to me!

MEG. But he'll be too busy! He must work all the time!

LEO. Well, not all the time.

MEG. But he wouldn't do it with me! I'm not a real actress! I'm not good enough!

LEO. Nonsense.

MEG. I'm not!

LEO. Margaret, I just heard you! You were marvelous!

MEG. But I have no training.

LEO. So he'll give you lessons! Private acting lessons! And you'll spend a lot of time together! — which believe me, he wouldn't mind at all.

MEG. Oh he'd hate that.

LEO. He would kill for it.

MEG. But —

LEO. Margaret. Didn't you tell me not five minutes ago that you would love to be an actress? More than anything in the world? Well here's your chance — and believe me, it isn't every day that chances — any chances — come along. Do it now, before life gets

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cold.

MEG. All right, I'll do it.

LEO. That's my girl!

MEG. Eeeeee! Oh my God. I can't believe it. And listen! Aunt Florence is giving a party the night before the wedding. We could do the performance then.

LEO. Well that's perfection!

MEG. But it won't interfere with the wedding, will it? I mean, you don't think Duncan will mind, do you?

LEO. Noooooo. Of course not.

MEG. Eeeee! This is incredible! Leo Clark!

LEO. Yes? ... Oh, yes! Leo Clark. The Leo Clark.

MEG. The New York Times called him "a living legend." It was on one of his flyers.

LEO. Yes, I remember that one ...

MEG. So you'll call him?

LEO. Who?

MEG. Mr. Clark.

LEO. Oh, yes yes yes. No problem. Leave it all to me.

MEG. All right. *(Pause.)* Would you like to see your room now?

You must be exhausted.

LEO. I think I'll wait here for Stephanie. If that's all right.

MEG. Oh yes.

LEO. You're sure?

MEG. Of course. Anything you want.

LEO. Anything?

MEG. You just have to name it and it's all yours. *(LEO groans.)*

Well. I'll be upstairs. When it gets really warm like this, I ... no, I can't tell you.

LEO. Oh tell me, please.

MEG. I can't.

LEO. Of course you can.

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MEG. You won't tell anybody?

LEO. I promise. It'll be just between us girls.

MEG. Well... when it gets really warm, I like to take off all my clothes and sprinkle water on my chest and just lie down on the bed spread out like a flag! *(LEO gulps.)* Have you ever tried it?

LEO. I do it all the time.

MEG. I'll see you later.

(MEG runs up the stairs to the door on the balcony.)

LEO. Oh, Margaret. By the way, which room is mine and Stephanie's?

MEG. This one. Mine. We're all sharing. The three of us. Isn't that great?!

LEO... Great.

(MEG EXITS, closing the door. LEO buckles at the knees.)

LEO. Oh God. Now we're in trouble. Jack! Jack!... Stephanie!

(LEO dashes out through the garden. The instant he's gone, JACK and AUDREY enter through the doors to the hall.)

AUDREY. COME WITH ME. I'LL SHOW YOU WHERE YOUR BEDROOM IS.

(AUDREY leads JACK up the stairs.)

AUDREY. Now this is your bedroom. Sleep. Snore. ZZZZ. Okay? I'll see ya later. *(JACK hugs her.)* Aw... Bye-bye. Now go ahead. Into your room.

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(JACK goes into the room and closes the door.)

AUDREY. Gee, what a nice girl.

(She walks away.)

JACK. *(Off.)* AHHHHHHHHH!!!

MEG. *(Off.)* AHHHHHHHHHH!!!

(JACK reels out of the room and stumbles across the balcony. MEG hurries out of the room with a towel around her. LEO REENTERS from the garden at the same time.)

JACK. Oh my God! Oh my God!

MEG. Stephanie, it's all right!

JACK. Oh my God!

AUDREY. Wait! Wait! Meg, listen! Holy cow! Stephanie is talking!

(MEG gasps.)

MEG. Maxine! Did you hear that. She's talking!

(LEO drops to his knees and throws his arms up to Heaven.)

LEO. Oh thank God! It's a miracle!

(Religious music. Trumpets and organ. Blackout.)

END OF ACT ONE

ACT II

Scene 1

(The lights come up on the living room, late afternoon, three days later. FLORENCE is hurrying out the door of her downstairs bedroom, pursued by DOC, who has a stethoscope around his neck.)

DOC. Florence!

FLORENCE. Shut up!

DOC. Will you please stay in bed!

FLORENCE. No!

DOC. Florence, if you don't listen to me, you are going to die!

FLORENCE. How would you know?

DOC. Because I will strangle you to death.

FLORENCE. I want to see Stephanie! My baby is talking! Someone could have told me about it three days ago!

DOC. You were hardly breathing three days ago, you were on life support!

FLORENCE. Well I still had ears, didn't I?!! I could have listened! I could have nodded my head!!

(FLORENCE makes a break for the front door.)

DOC. Florence get back in that bed.

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(At which moment, JACK ENTERS dressed as STEPHANIE, in a day dress.)

FLORENCE. Stephanie! Stephanie, there you are! I just heard the news. Let me hear you speak.

JACK. *(At a loss; then, wispy and flower-like.)* ... I need a drink.

FLORENCE. Oh, my heart! Did you hear that? The tone. The lightness. It's her mother's voice.

JACK. Dear Mama. So sweet. So gentle. When she entered the room it was like a summer breeze.

FLORENCE. She weighed three hundred pounds.

JACK. Yes. Of course. But so light on her feet ...

FLORENCE. It's true, it's true! Now tell me, how does it feel, speaking aloud for the first time? Is it exciting?

JACK. Well, it is quite a surprise in some ways. In my head, I always sounded like Lucille Ball.

(DUNCAN ENTERS.)

DUNCAN. Well, good morning. Florence. Stephanie. I was looking for Margaret.

JACK. I believe that she and Maxine went shopping for the day. In Philadelphia.

FLORENCE. Isn't it amazing, Duncan. Stephanie, talking after all these years.

DUNCAN. Amazing. Almost miraculous.

JACK. But as a man of the cloth, surely you believe in miracles. Reverend Wooley.

DUNCAN. Well, I believe that miracles happen to people who are deserving of miracles.

JACK. And you don't think that I'm deserving?

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DUNCAN. Well, you might be, but I don't know you very well, now do I? You came onto the scene somewhat unexpectedly. At a rather unfortunate time.

JACK. *(Starting to whimper, trying to hide the tears.)* Oh, dear, I'm sorry if I'm a nuisance...

DUNCAN. I didn't say that —

JACK. Perhaps Maxine and I should just go home ...

FLORENCE. Don't even think about it!

JACK. *(Weeping now.)* But he said that we're unfortunate!

DUNCAN. I didn't say that either!

FLORENCE. Duncan, be quiet!

JACK. But if he doesn't like us, then we should go.

FLORENCE. Oh, who cares what he thinks. I never liked him anyway.

DUNCAN. Florence!

FLORENCE. Stephanie, come to my room!

JACK. Actually, I thought I might take a walk ...

FLORENCE. To my room! Now!

JACK. Yes, Aunt Florence.

DOC. Florence, I'll be back tomorrow.

FLORENCE. Don't do me any favors, Dr. Crippen. Just stay away from me! Stephanie!

JACK. Coming!

(FLORENCE EXITS, followed by JACK.)

DOC. I don't understand it. She's getting stronger by the minute. It must have something to do with the rise of evil in the world, it's giving her strength.

DUNCAN. Doctor, don't you find it incredible that a woman who has been deaf and dumb all her life is suddenly talking like this?

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DOC. Well, there have been cases like this before, medically speaking. Usually caused by some jolt to the system. Apparently in her case it was the shock of seeing Meg lying there on the bed, buck naked.

DUNCAN. Doctor —

DOC. Of course, that would do anybody a lot of good. If I'd been in her shoes I'd have done a lot more than start talking. Ha!

DUNCAN. Doctor, please!

DOC. Please what?! It's called living, Duncan. Sex. Living. Humor. Have you heard of these things?! I have to go. I have patients to see. I have a real job.

(When DOC is gone, DUNCAN looks around furtively, then he goes to the telephone and dials a number.)

DUNCAN. Hello? Inspector Ballard, please. ... Ah, good, it's Reverend Wooley. Now, have you made any progress concerning the two women? ... Yes, I know it's only been two days, but... No, I don't have any evidence. That's what I want you to find. ... No, I don't know that they're frauds. I suspect they are. ... Because they're odd! ... Well for one thing, they're very large women, and —... Well yes, people do vary in size, but ...well one of them was deaf and dumb since birth and now she's talking! ... Well yes, I suppose I'm happy for her, but... Look, officer, I can't put my finger on it, but they're not being honest about something. They're sort of... shady. ... No, they haven't tried to get me in a card game! I don't play cards, I'm a minister!... Well... yes, bridge occasionally.

MEG. *(Off.)* Duncan?

DUNCAN. *(Quickly.)* Look, I have to go now, just keep working on it. I'll call you later. Good-bye.

(As DUNCAN hangs up, MEG hurries in carrying several purchases,

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including a dress box. She's wearing a pretty new hat and a duster over her dress. She's in high spirits.)

MEG. Oh, Duncan, wait till you hear! Maxine and I had a day out together and we had the most wonderful time! First we went shopping at Saks Fifth Avenue!, and Maxine insisted I get this dress for the party. At first, in the dressing room, I couldn't even get it on. But then Maxine helped me into it. Poor thing. As she was pulling it over my hips, she got faint. Then we had lunch at the Bellevue and we ordered snails, then we had our nails done, then more shopping at this little boutique where they simply worship Maxine, then tea at the Ritz, at the corner table, and I had a champagne cocktail!

DUNCAN. Ah.

MEG. Is something wrong?

DUNCAN. No, no... I would have liked to have known you were going, that's all...

MEG. I'm sorry, Duncan. I forgot to tell you. But Maxine says it's so important to be spontaneous in life. Try new things, take chances. As they say in French, *metmoyer!*

(MEG removes her coat to reveal that she's wearing a stylish new dress.)

DUNCAN. Margaret!

MEG. Do you like it?

DUNCAN. It's a little snug, isn't it?

MEG. Maybe a little... But listen, I have something to tell you. We went to a bridal shop and looked at wedding gowns.

DUNCAN. Margaret! We agreed on business attire!

MEG. I know. She just wanted me to look. But she says that a bride should have a gown. And an engagement ring. She says it means so much to a girl.

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DUNCAN. Well, heh heh, not all girls would agree with her there. Mm? Right?

MEG. Well, I do think a ring would be nice, Duncan.

DUNCAN. You do?

MEG. Yes. I do.

DUNCAN. (*Nettled.*) Well why didn't you say so before?

MEG. I did but you weren't listening.

DUNCAN. No you didn't.

MEG. Yes I did.

DUNCAN. You did not!

MEG. Do we have to argue about it?

DUNCAN. We are not arguing! If you want a ring, you can have a ring. I just want to make you happy. You know that.

MEG. Maxine says that you have to pick it.

DUNCAN. Of course I'll pick it.

MEG. She says it should have a diamond in the middle.

DUNCAN. Fine, I'll get a diamond.

MEG. With a platinum setting.

DUNCAN. Who is this for?! You or Maxine?!

MEG. Duncan, you're yelling at me.

DUNCAN. No I'm not! It's just... I have been under a great deal of strain. Now if you'll excuse me, I have some charity work to do.

(DUNCAN leaves. MEG passes a mirror and notices herself. She poses, admiring herself in her new dress. LEO appears at the garden doors, dressed as a man, but she doesn't see him. He looks every inch the star actor. MEG strikes another pose, more daring. She notices how the dress emphasizes her breasts — she has cleavage! — and she starts to shimmy in front of the mirror, like a stripper, really going way out on a limb. As she gyrates in front of the mirror, LEO walks further into the room and watches

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... and then she sees him.)

MEG. Yahhh!

LEO. Excuse me. Sorry. Is this the home of a Miss Florence Snider?

(MEG recognizes him immediately as "LEO CLARK" and gasps.)

MEG... Yes, it is.

LEO. Oh, good. I'm looking for someone who's staying here —

MEG. Maxine.

LEO. That's right. How do you ...?

MEG. You're Leo Clark, aren't you?!

LEO. (*Puzzled.*) Yes.

MEG. (*Curtsying instinctively, overcome with awe.*) Oh, how do you do! Please, come in, I'm Maxine's cousin. Meg. And I am just so thrilled to meet you! Maxine has told me all about you. Which I knew already! Because of who you are. I mean, Leo Clark, ... She'll be along in a minute. We just got back from a little shopping spree. She had something to do at the station. Well, she had to use the bathroom, but I suppose I shouldn't say that. (*She laughs nervously.*) Would you like to sit down?

LEO. I'm fine.

MEG. I just want to say how... kind it is of you to come all this way. And I am so thrilled about being in a play with you... and-and if you want to back out of it, I understand. I mean, you're an actor. A real actor. You have a body. ... I mean, your body is trained. It's an instrument. A treasure. And my treasure isn't trained at all. My instrument. My body! The way yours is.

(She looks away and makes a face. She wants to kill herself.)

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LEO. (*Quietly.*) You have the most beautiful eyes I have ever seen. I'll go find Maxine.

(LEO EXITS through the garden. MEG is in a daze. Then JACK, still dressed as STEPHANIE, ENTERS from the hall.)

JACK. Margaret? ... Did you have a nice outing? Are you all right?

MEG. Oh, Stephanie. I just met the most intriguing man.

(Without warning, LEO reenters.)

LEO. Sorry, just one more thing ...

JACK. AHH!

MEG. Stephanie, this is Leo Clark. The famous actor!

JACK. You-you-you-

MEG. She's speechless. I know just how she feels. Stephanie is Maxine's sister. Have you two met before?

LEO. No, but she's even prettier than Maxine said she was. Anyway, I just wanted to say that rehearsal starts tomorrow at ten.

MEG. I wouldn't miss it for the world. (*To Jack.*) We're putting on a play at the wedding.

JACK. Oh, really? Well, that's news to me.

MEG. Maxine is directing and Mr. Clark and I are starring in it! Wait. Do you think that Stephanie could be in it?

LEO. Well, I suppose we could put her in the dance at the end. Like some enormous elf or sprite...

MEG. Oh, that's wonderful. Isn't he wonderful?

JACK. Mmmmm...

MEG. Wait! There are some lines I need to ask you about. For the play. I marked them in my copy and it's in my room someplace. I'll be right back. Don't go way. All right?

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LEO. Of course.

(*She backs away, trying to be sophisticated, and trips on her packages. Then she gathers them all up and runs off. But she's gone out through the wrong door — and she hurries right back in to the room.*)

MEG. The, uh, bedroom's upstairs ...

(*She fumbles her way up the stairs and into her bedroom, closing the door with a bang. JACK turns, furious.*)

JACK. You crumb.

LEO. I can explain —

JACK. You traitor.

LEO. I did it for both of us.

JACK. You did not! You did it to get Meg! So you could just-just-

(*He indicates sexual intercourse.*)

LEO. Jack!

JACK. You have put my entire life in jeopardy so you could have a little snog in the grass!

LEO. That's not true!

JACK. You want to play the hero and wear trousers and fool around, while I have to wear this stinking dress and this GODDAM BRASSIERE!

LEO. Would you keep it down!

JACK. NO! Hey! Where are you going?!

LEO. (*Exiting.*) Any place until you keep your voice down.

JACK. Get back here, I'm not finished! ... Leo! Get back in

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here or you can go to hello ...! *(As LEO runs out, DUNCAN ENTERS — so JACK has to immediately turn his galloping man-walk into a mincing female-walk.)* Ta-ta, good-bye.

(JACK EXITS, and DUNCAN strides into the room, simply ecstatic.)

DUNCAN. Meg! Meg? Meg, get down here!

(MEG ENTERS from above.)

MEG. Duncan, what is it? Where's Mr. Clark?

DUNCAN. Who?

MEG. Leo Clark, the actor. He was just here.

DUNCAN. Fine, fine, fine, now listen. I was walking past the house just now and one of those Western Union boys was coming to the door. I said can I help you, he said do you live here and I said yes —

MEG. But you don't live here.

DUNCAN. I know that. That's not the point! He brought this telegram addressed to you. I gave him a tip by the way, so you might want to re-im... no, forget it. But listen to this!

MEG. Duncan —

DUNCAN. Just listen! "Saw advertisement in London Times. Stop. Both of us thrilled. Stop. Embarking from Southampton tomorrow and will arrive your house morning of June 8. Stop. Love, Maxine and Stephanie!" Ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

MEG. *(Taking the telegram.)* I don't understand.

DUNCAN. Understand what? It's obvious. These two are your real cousins! They arrive here the day before the wedding. And so the ones who came on Monday, those horrible, big, pushy creatures, are both frauds. Hee, hee, hee, hee, hee, hee! I knew it! Oh, it'll be just like old times. *(With a Russian accent:)* "Dahnce vit me, my

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dahlink."

(He dances her around the room.)

MEG. Duncan, stop it! This is ridiculous!

(He gives her a big kiss on the lips. The news has made him passionate. When the kiss breaks off, she keeps talking as though nothing has happened.)

MEG. Maxine is wonderful. And so is Stephanie. They can't be frauds.

DUNCAN. Margaret, they are not your cousins. They have come here to fool you and take your money.

MEG. I don't believe you.

DUNCAN. Well then how do you explain this telegram? Huh? "Love, Maxine and Stephanie!"

MEG. Well... I suppose that... wait. It's simple. They must be the frauds. That's it, I'm sure of it!

DUNCAN. Oh, Margaret —

MEG. They have to be, and I'll tell you why. I can prove it. Because Maxine — our Maxine, the real one — knows Leo Clark, the famous actor, and they're old friends! She even asked him here and he just arrived!

DUNCAN. So what? That doesn't prove anything!

MEG. Of course it does! He's an established actor, everyone knows him, and she's one of his best friends!

DUNCAN. Well maybe this best friend of his is a con artist.

MEG. Oh, stop it.

DUNCAN. And maybe he's in on it, too! Have you thought of that?! They could be splitting the boodle!

MEG. Oh, Duncan. He's Leo Clark. He's in the theatre. Theatre

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people wouldn't do that kind of thing!

DUNCAN. Wouldn't d - !! Meg, they are actors, they lie for a living! That's their profession! They are all big liars!! Look, look, look, we can decide this easily, right now, no problem. We will show your so-called friends this telegram, you will stand here and watch their reactions and that will settle it, case closed.

MEG. Duncan. You will not show them that telegram. Ever.

DUNCAN. What?

MEG. I will not have them offended in this house.

DUNCAN. But Marg —

MEG. They are the sweetest, kindest women that ever lived and I will not let you do it.

DUNCAN. But they are not your cousins!

MEG. Yes they are! And if you tell them a single word about that telegram — just one word — I'll-I'll-I'll do something. And that's final! Especially now that Leo Clark is here.

DUNCAN. "Leo Clark." What is he doing here anyway?

(Beat. MEG takes a breath. Her heart is pounding, but she tries to look unfazed.)

MEG. He's starring in a play... which we're putting on the night before the wedding... which I will be playing in as well... as an actress. So now you know.

DUNCAN. Margaret!

MEG. I'm sorry, Duncan, but that's how it is. Now please go. I have to study my lines. I'll see you later.

(DUNCAN tries to say something, but he's speechless. He turns and leaves with as much dignity as he can muster. MEG has never stood up for herself like this before and it's been the ordeal of a lifetime. When DUNCAN is gone, she takes a deep breath to

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calm herself. Then she snatches up her copy of the play and bounds to the French doors.)

MEG. *(At the doors; romantically, as Viola in Twelfth Night.)* O time, thou must untangle this, not I / It is too hard a knot for me t'untie.

(With a look of determination, she hurries out of the room — as the scene changes to:)

Scene 2

(The living room, ten days later, mid-morning. DOC ENTERS in his Elizabethan costume for the play, as Sir Toby Belch, including scarlet tights, a doublet, a sword, and an impressive codpiece.)

DOC. Butch, come on!

BUTCH. *(Off.)* No!

DOC. Butch now stop it! The rehearsal starts in two minutes!

BUTCH. *(Off.)* I'm not coming out!

DOC. Butch, I'm telling you, it's a nice costume. You look terrific. Now get out here!

(BUTCH ENTERS dressed as Sir Andrew Aguecheek. He wears baggy hose, a moth-eaten doublet and a floppy hat from which emerges a wig of straight blond hair that looks like yellow straw sticking out to his shoulders.)

BUTCH. I look like a broom with shoes on.

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(AUDREY ENTERS in costume. She's dressed as Sebastian, an Elizabethan man.)

AUDREY. Good morning, everybody!

DOC & BUTCH. Morning!/Morning!

AUDREY. (Striking a pose.) "This is the air; that is the glorious sun;

(JACK ENTERS dressed as STEPHANIE — but not in costume for Twelfth Night.)

JACK. Good morning!

AUDREY. This pearl she gave me, I do feel't and see't ..."

BUTCH. "En garde! Ha! Ha! Ha!... Ha! Ha!

DOC. "What a plague means my niece to take the death of her brother thus."

JACK. "Item, two lips indifferent red; item, two grey eyes with lids to them —"

(LEO ENTERS, as LEO, carrying his script.)

LEO. Good morning, everyone. ("Morning/Morning.") It's time for rehearsal. Let's get started. Sofa, please.

(Everyone pitches in to move the furniture out of the way.)

JACK. (To AUDREY.) Oh, isn't this fun! I just love rehearsals. Here, give us a hug.

AUDREY. Aww ...

JACK. Give us another.

AUDREY. Aww ...

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JACK. Give us a — (LEO coughs pointedly.) Oh, sorry.

LEO. Right. Sit down, sit down.

(MEG ENTERS dressed as Viola/Caesar — and so her costume is identical to AUDREY's. It's a glorious costume with mirrored patchwork and rakish hat with a feather.)

MEG. Hi everyone, I'm sorry I'm late.

(She and AUDREY see each other — and realizing that they look identical, scream for joy, then strike a mirror-image pose.)

LEO. One face, one voice, one habit and two persons; / A natural perspective, that is, and is not. Sit down, please. (Everyone sits on the floor facing LEO.) Now Maxine, our esteemed director, has asked me to give you a few notes while she's out looking for props.

JACK. I thought she did that yesterday.

LEO. She's doing it again.

JACK. Oh. She does that quite a lot, doesn't she?

LEO. Well, Stephanie, there are a lot of props in the play.

JACK. And therefore she just disappears.

LEO. Exactly.

JACK. Aha. That's very informative. Thank you, Leo, you good-looking hunk of man, you.

LEO. Thank you, Stephanie. Now Meg, I want to... (STEPHANIE raises her hand.) Yes, Stephanie?

JACK. May I be excused? I have to use the little ladies.

LEO. Please do.

JACK. Thank you. I'll be back in a moment. (To AUDREY) Give us a hug. Ta ta.

(JACK EXITS.)

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LEO. Now Meg we'll start with you. A general note, remember to keep your head up so we can see your face.

MEG. Right.

LEO. And I want you to articulate every word. "My father had a daughter." Try it.

(MEG stands, takes a breath; then does the Viola speech from Act 2, Scene 4 — and does it beautifully.)

MEG. "My father had a daughter loved a man — As it might be perhaps, were I a woman, I should your lordship."

LEO. *(As Orsino.)* "And what's her history?"

MEG. "A blank, my lord. She never told her love,
But let concealment, like a worm in the bud,
Feed on her damask cheek. She pined in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy,
She sat like Patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed?"

LEO. Much better. Just keep practicing. Tongue, tongue, "Was not this love indeed."

MEG. *(With her own meaning.)* "Was not this love indeed."

(She sits.)

LEO. Good. Doctor. Because you're doubling as the Sea Captain and Sir Toby, you might want to create a different physical presence for each one. Perhaps, as the Captain, you might stoop a little. The old sea dog type. Then as Sir Toby, you might be more ... rollicking.

DOC. Rollicking. Got it.

LEO. Butch.

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BUTCH. Yes sir!

LEO. Don't rush your lines so much.

BUTCH. I can't help it. I get nervous.

LEO. Try it for me.

BUTCH. Now? In front of everybody?

LEO. Butch, in ten days, you'll be doing it in front of a hundred people. Stand up.

(BUTCH groans. He stands up and poses stiffly.)

LEO. Now just relax. *(LEO does a relaxing exercise, shaking his arms and humming. BUTCH imitates it. BUTCH then does each of the things that LEO now suggests:)* Bend your knees a little. Now let your arms hang at your sides. Look up. And relax your jaw. *(By this time, BUTCH looks like a gargoyle with rickets.)* We'll get there.

(At which moment, JACK ENTERS through the garden, dressed as himself.)

JACK. Knock knock? Leo! It's me! Jack! *(LEO is shocked. How did JACK do that so fast? Perhaps he screams as JACK did when LEO first appeared as LEO in the previous scene.)* Your friend, Jack! I heard you were in these parts, so I thought I'd drop by.

AUDREY. Oh my gosh. Hey, remember me? We met on the train!

JACK. Audrey.

MEG. Hello, I'm Meg. I saw you in Philadelphia -

BUTCH. My name's Butch!

AUDREY. I was wondering if I'd see you again...

DOC. Hi, I'm Doctor Myers...

LEO. Excuse me. Excuse me! ... We're having a rehearsal.

THE ACTORS. Sorry... sorry...

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(They retreat to their seats on the floor.)

LEO. For those of you who don't know him this is Jack Gable, who used to be an old friend of mine.

(The following exchange is one of utterly false bonhomie.)

JACK. Are you surprised to see me? Huh? Just a little?

LEO. No, I've been expecting you for quite some time. I was simply waiting for you to think of it.

JACK. Well, when I heard that you had arrived here, I thought "Now why should he have all the fun?"

LEO. Because I thought of it first and I have a real reason for being here. Ha.

JACK. Ha, ha.

LEO. Ha, ha, ha.

JACK. Ha ha ha ha.

BOTH. Hahahahahahahahaha.

(The cast joins in the fun.)

LEO. Now please sit down, we're rehearsing.

JACK. Right.

(JACK and AUDREY sit next to each other, quite cozy together.)

LEO. All right. Butch. Your lines. And don't rush.

BUTCH. "Sir-Toby-Belch-how-now-Sir Toby! I'll-stay-a-month-longer-I-am-a-fellow-of-the-strangest-mind-in-the-world-I-delight-in-masques-and-revels-sometimes-altogether-and-I-excel-at-kikshaws-of-every-kind-and-I-think-I-have-the-back-trick-

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LEO. Stop, stop, STOP! THAT'S TOO FAST! *(BUTCH turns away, hurt.)* No. I'm sorry. I-I shouldn't have yelled. I'm sorry.

JACK. You know, I think Maxine could help right now. She listens better than you do.

LEO. Surprisingly, that's a good idea. I'll go find her. Everybody, take five.

(LEO EXITS. The actors relax and start chatting. BUTCH is low.)

BUTCH. Gee, I'm tryin' to slow down. I really am.

JACK. You'll be fine, I promise. Look. Try this. After every, say, five words, take a breath and say to yourself the word ... Mississippi.

BUTCH. I can do that!

DOC. Of course you can! You could be a star! It just takes practice.

BUTCH. Thanks, Dad. And you're doing great!

DOC. Aw. Come on. As they say in show biz, let's "run your lines."

(They move away, leaving AUDREY and JACK alone together.)

AUDREY. Hey. You're really nice, ya know that?

JACK. You know what? The feeling is mutual.

AUDREY. Aw, get outa here... So what brings you to York, PA?

JACK. The truth? I've been having dreams about roller skating and I thought of you.

AUDREY. Gee that's nice.

JACK. How's the play coming?

AUDREY. It's coming great. But the thing is, I'm playing somebody of the opposite sex. His name is Sebastian. He's supposed to be Meg's twin brother, which is nuts. Me as a guy! But I've thought