

LEADING LADIES

up an angle. See, I'm gonna play him as a real tough guy. I do this great Marlon Brando imitation, but I figure I won't tell Maxine till later. I'll just surprise her.

JACK. What a good idea.

AUDREY. So how do you know Maxine and Stephanie?

JACK. Me? Oh, they... didn't they tell you? Well, they-they practically raised me.

AUDREY. No kiddin'.

JACK. I can still remember Stephanie singing me to sleep every night.

AUDREY. But I thought she was deaf and dumb till recently.

JACK. She used a tape recorder and moved her lips.

AUDREY. Are you puttin' me on? Get outa here.

JACK. Here, give us a hug... I mean, me a hug. Give me a hug.

(AUDREY hugs him, slightly confused. At this moment, LEO ENTERS from the hall, dressed as MAXINE in a very chic pants outfit, having changed in a hurry. She's in director mode now, flying everywhere, half business, half Bernhardt.)

LEO. Darlings! Oh, my darlings, forgive me! *(Into the garden.)* Thank you, Leo! Take your time! I was scouting for props amid the roiling sea of the York County merchants. Jack! Jack! My dear boy!

JACK. Maxine! How good to see you!

LEO. Oh let me look at you. Why, you've put on weight. You're getting enormously fat.

JACK. Well you look marvelous. You've always had that big, raw-boned mannish look.

LEO. Why thank you. Aren't you sweet. *(He pinches JACK's cheek and has to restrain himself from doing JACK an injury.)* Now Jack dear, do me a favor and go find Stephanie. I need her for rehearsal. And tell her to get into costume.

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JACK. Costume? Now?

LEO. Yes now, dear, before anyone gets hurt.

JACK. Oh all right.

(JACK EXITS.)

LEO. Now let's all take another minute while I settle down. Chat among yourselves. Whoo. Hot. I'm afraid I rushed too much...

(She blows down into her blouse, and she sits next to MEG.)

LEO. So. My dear. How is it coming along? Do you feel bright-eyed and bushy-tailed?

MEG. *(Troubled.)* Well, it's coming, I guess. But not the way I hoped it would.

LEO. Is something wrong?

MEG. Well, not really.

LEO. "Well not really." That doesn't sound very promising at all. Can you tell me about it?

MEG. Well, it's just... I've never done any real acting before and there's so much to remember. Head up. Enunciate. Move left, move right. You and Leo are professionals. And you work with professionals. From the Royal Academy! And they're all sophisticated, and they know everything and they've been everywhere. ... I just... I can't imagine what Leo must think of me.

(She's ready to cry by this time.)

LEO. Margaret. *(He takes her hand.)* Let me tell you something. I'll say it once, and I don't want to say it again. You are an extraordinary woman. You can do anything you set your mind to. And everyone has to start some place. Olivier was born in some

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dinky little town in Southern England, and Katherine Hepburn was born in Cape Cod someplace with a knife in her teeth. You are not defined by where you start, but by where you end up. As for the play, there are two rules for every actor: remember your lines and don't bump into the furniture. That is my line. Noel Coward stole it from me. As for traveling or not traveling, you will get to Paris one of these days if I have to carry you on my back and swim. And when you get there, you will look around and say to yourself: I was just as sophisticated before I left, only now I need a bath. All right?

MEG... All right.

LEO. Good. And remember: Lines,

MEG. And furniture. Got it. Maxine... thank you for staying for the wedding.

LEO. My dear, I think of nothing else.

(At this moment, JACK REENTERS as STEPHANIE, only he's dressed for his role as OLIVIA in something wildly seductive and outrageous — Spanish perhaps — and he's not happy about it.)

JACK. Well. Are you happy now?

LEO. Stephanie. You look as ridi - as charming as I hoped you would. All right, everyone, line up, please. Line up. Let me see my cast all together. Let's go ...

(The cast lines up, a truly motley crew of all shapes and sizes, variously terrified [BUTCH], over-confident [DOC], confused [AUDREY], annoyed [JACK] and thrilled [MEG]. They should remind us of the mechanicals in A Midsummer Night's Dream — a valiant band of well-meaning locals who haven't got a clue.)

LEO. Now I want each of you to recite your favorite line from

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the play, in character, reaching way down deep, showing me the absolute finest performance of which you are capable. Sir Toby.

(Each character steps forward, does his or her speech and steps back in line.)

SIR TOBY/DOC. *(Rollicking, hands on hips — truly awful.)*
What a plague means my niece to take the death of her brother thus?!
Ha! Ha! I'm sure care's an enemy to life! Ha ha! Ho ho! Ha ha!
Rollicking.

SIR ANDREW/BUTCH. *(Strikes his pose.)*
Methinks sometimes
I have no more wit, Mississippi,
Than a Christian or an ordinary man has, Mississippi!
Oh had I but followed the arts, Mississippi!

OLIVIA/JACK. *(The great diva.)*
By the roses of the spring,
By maidenhood, honor, truth and everything,
I love thee so, in spite of all thy pride,
Nor wit nor reason can my passion hide!

VIOLA/MEG.
As I am man,
My state is desperate for my master's love.
As I am woman *(Now alas the day!)*,
What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe?

SEBASTIAN/AUDREY. *(Very Brando, both in voice and gesture.)*

Ah, me. My stars shine darkly over me.
I seek in this strange land my sister,
My twin, in hope she is not drowned.

LEO. And there you have it. Each one better than the next.
Soon this room will be decorated like a fairy land and we, the actors

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of this comedy called life, will be presenting a one-in-a-million performance of Twelfth Night, and all I can say is May God Be With Us!

(The lights change and the cast scatters.)

Scene 3

(As the lights change, we hear a dance band in the garden playing a popular dance tune of the period over the clinking of party glasses. In a blue half-light, our company of actors move the furniture back into place; simultaneously, stagehands dressed as caterers begin decorating the room with flowers, a screen and a punch bowl and glasses. Small white fairy lights come on in the garden — and by the end of the transition, the room looks joyfully party-like.)

It's ten days later and the party is in progress. Just as the caterers finish decorating the room, the lights come up on the balcony above the living room, and DUNCAN enters from down the hall. There's a telephone up there, outside Meg's bedroom, and he picks up the receiver and dials, furtively. He's extremely upset.)

FLORENCE. *(Off.)* Duncan, get down here!

DUNCAN. *(Calling.)* I'll be down in a minute, Florence! *(To himself.)* You old bat! *(Into the phone.)* Ah, Inspector Ballard, it's Reverend Wooley again. Sorry to bother you at this... Yes, I know it's seven-thirty, but I've been trying to get you all ... Well, you didn't answer any of the messages! Now listen, I'm at Florence's house right now, at the party. ... Well I'm sorry you weren't invited but I

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wasn't in charge of the guest list. ... Well, yes, I had some influence, but... Yes, the food is excellent, I'm very sorry you weren't invited, but please just listen! Do you remember I told you about the telegram from the real Maxine and Stephanie — well, it said they'd arrive this morning and they aren't here yet! Of course it has me worried! I told you about this whole thing weeks ago! You were supposed to help me! Yes I am, very upset, and I'll tell you why. Because Maxine, the big one, told me this morning that she overheard Florence changing her will. She's leaving everything to Stephanie, the smaller one. ... Yes, they're both large, but one is bigger than the other! The point is, Stephanie doesn't deserve it! ... Well, yes, I hope Florence lasts forever, but it isn't very likely, now is it?

FLORENCE. *(Off.)* Duncan!

DUNCAN, Shut up! *(Into the phone.)* All right, I'll tell you what I think you should do. I think you should arrest them both. Right now. Send a squad car. ... Of course you need evidence, but you were supposed to find it! That's your job! ... I'm not criticizing you! I'm stating a fact!

FLORENCE. *(Off.)* Duncan! Where the hell are you?!

DUNCAN, I'M COMING! *(Into the phone, desperate.)* Look, just do something, but do it now! ... Thank you! *(He hangs up.)* God!

(He realizes what he just said — at which moment, the lights change and a tango starts to play. FLORENCE appears, dressed to the nines, and starts tangoing. She has taken years of lessons and has great flair. DUNCAN ENTERS and joins her. He's miserable. They complete the first section of the dance and dance out — as AUDREY and BUTCH dance into the room. AUDREY is terrific, BUTCH is trying hard to keep up. They perform the second section and then go — as STEPHANIE and DOC enter

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tangoing up a storm. Shades of "Some Like It Hot." When they complete the third section, the other couples come back on and all three couples dance the coda in unison and end with a flourish. Note: this should be choreographed as a real dance number. When the dance is over, everyone filters off into the garden, except FLORENCE and AUDREY, who linger for a moment.)

AUDREY. Ooh, this is such a good party, I can tell already. And just wait'll you see the play tonight. You'll go insane.

FLORENCE. Well, that's something to look forward to.

AUDREY. You know, I've just gotta say, it's really nice of you to do this for Meg. Next time somebody says to me you're nothin' but a nasty old bat, I'm gonna say, "Oh yeah? You only know the half of it."

FLORENCE. Thank you.

(As they EXIT, LEO and JACK ENTER simultaneously, JACK from the garden. LEO is LEO, dressed in a dinner jacket, and JACK is Stephanie, in a party dress, just having danced.)

LEO. Jack — !

JACK. If I have to dance one more minute in high heels, I'll kill myself. You should see them out there, hip, sway, hip, sway. I'm telling you it's a whole other sex.

LEO. Jack listen! We have to stop the wedding.

JACK. Stop the — ... Why? What are you talking about?!

LEO. So that I can marry Meg.

JACK. Marry her? I thought you just wanted to ...

(He indicates sexual intercourse.)

LEO. Jack, I'm in love with her!

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JACK. Oh, really? So you've been stringing me along the whole time under false pretenses! And what about Julius Caesar?! Huh?! And-and-and King Lear, and Hamlet! That's what you live for!

LEO. Yes. I did. And I want all that. If it's possible. But Jack, I'm in love. Deeply in love. I want a house, and neighbors and a front door.

JACK. That was my idea!

LEO. And you were right! You were exactly right! And we're almost there. It could be us.

JACK. "Us?" What have I got to do with this?

LEO. Well you and Audrey.

JACK. What do you mean?! We're ... friends.

LEO. Jack, whenever she walks into the room, you start drooling. And last night she told me she's in love with you. She wants to marry you.

JACK. ... She said that? *(LEO nods, JACK is speechless, then he explodes with joy.)* Hoo-hooooo! Ha-haaaaaaa! Yes!!! Yyyyyyyyyyes!!! I know it! Ha-haaaaaaa!

Did she really say that?

LEO. No, but you can see the effect it has on you.

JACK. Leo —!

LEO. Now listen. Jack. You've got to help me. I have spent three weeks trying to convince Meg to leave Duncan and marry me and I've gotten nowhere. She feels obligated to him. So, I have a plan. The final gambit. I want you to seduce Duncan. Offer him your body. As Stephanie, of course.

JACK. What?

LEO. You see, this morning I told Duncan that I overheard Florence talking to her lawyer, cutting Margaret and Maxine out of her will and leaving everything to Stephanie. Well Duncan is beside himself! He wants the money for some foundation or something. So if you give him even the slightest encouragement he'll go after

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you. Now here's the trick: Meg and I will be hiding behind this screen watching everything. We'll jump out and catch him the second he starts to undress you.

JACK. Un-un-undress -

LEO. It's the old screen gambit, like in *Twelfth Night* and *School for Scandal*.

JACK. Are you crazy? ARE YOU NUTS?!!!!

LEO. Jack! You have to do this. When Meg sees him for what he is, she'll give him up! Then I can marry her!

JACK. No.

LEO. Please.

JACK. No!

LEO. Jack, you're my best friend! If I ever needed you in my whole life, I need you now!

JACK. I have spent the last four weeks of my life dressed as a woman, I can't take a bath without you guarding the door, and I have nightmares, really horrible nightmares, about talking brassieres!

LEO. Is that a yes?

JACK. *(Whimpering.)* Yes.

LEO. Good. Here's the letter.

JACK. What letter?

LEO. From you to Duncan. *(Points to the envelope.)* See? "Duncan." It says that you'll meet him here at 8 o'clock and that you find him sexually attractive.

JACK. Oh, God!

(AUDREY ENTERS from the garden.)

AUDREY. Has anyone seen Jack?

JACK. Yes? *(Catches himself.)* No! No Jack. Not here. All gone.

LEO. Stephanie, you can ask her now.

JACK. Huh?

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LEO. She's so shy. She wants you to deliver this letter.

AUDREY. Sure, no problem.

(She takes the envelope - as MEG enters at the top of the stairs dressed for the party and looking gorgeous. We hear a romantic song of the period wafting in from the garden.)

MEG. Hi everybody. Sorry to interrupt. Has anyone seen Duncan?

LEO. Duncan, Duncan, never heard of him. They're playing our song. Shall we dance?

MEG. Well... all right.

(They dance around the room like Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers - then sweep out into the garden, leaving AUDREY and JACK alone. AUDREY sighs.)

AUDREY. Isn't love great. Some day I'm gonna find just the right guy. And believe you me, on that wedding night, in some big soft comfy bed, I'm gonna make him really happy. Hey, come here, you're drooling. *(She pulls out a hankie and mops around his mouth.)*

Aw. Here. Give us a hug. Ooh! Stephanie, watch your fingers!

JACK. Sorry, sorry... I-I-I think I should go now. Bye-bye.

(He reels up the stairs and through the door.)

AUDREY. Gee she's a nice girl.

(AUDREY turns and accidentally drops the envelope in the punch bowl. She fishes it out and wipes it with her sleeve.)

AUDREY. Ahh! Oh, darn! Would you look at this envelope?

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I'm supposed to deliver it and now I can't read it. Let's see... D. It starts with a D. D-U. Or is that an O? Who do I know that starts with a D ...? (*DOC ENTERS.*) Hi, Doc. Wait! Doc. "D." Doctor. Doc, this letter is for you. It's from Stephanie.

DOC. For me?

AUDREY. She asked me to give it to you. See you later.

(And AUDREY EXITS. DOC is alone.)

DOC. From Stephanie? That's odd. *(He opens the letter and reads.)* "My dear friend, You are a healer of souls. You are a man of compassion to those in your care. You are my sunshine, my only sunshine, You make me happy when skies are gray... As the song says, I adore you." ... What? "As you know, I am now an heiress, but please don't let my millions stand in your way. I never felt religious until I met you, but now I want to sit on your pulpit. May you enter my house and dwell there forever." The woman is an animal! A very large animal! "Take me. Ravish me. Meet me tonight in the living room at 8 o'clock." That's in ten minutes! "Your loving and devoted, Stephanie. P.S. Don't take no for an answer." God in Heaven. She's just been playing hard to get! I should have known from that first time we met. She just looked at me and never said a word. Of course, she was deaf and dumb at the time. But still. She had those bedroom eyes. Droopy. Sensuous. Astigmatic. I shall return.

(He hurries out, as MEG and LEO dance in.)

MEG. Well. I can't believe it's finally happening. The wedding, I mean. I've actually been remarkably calm about it. Up to now. I don't know why, I guess it seemed so far away. But then suddenly, last night, as I was lying there in bed, my stomach got very tight,

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and my heart started—

(He stops her mouth with a kiss. A really great kiss.)

MEG. No!

LEO. Meg. I love you.

MEG. Leo, stop.

LEO. I can't. I love you more than anything in the world.

MEG. I'm getting married tomorrow!

LEO. Then don't. Not to him. Marry me instead.

MEG. Leo, I can't do that! I promised Duncan!

LEO. But he's not right for you! Meg, you deserve a life! You have to see Paris, and do some acting and travel the world! Now I have a plan, so just listen. You and I are going to stand right here, behind this screen and watch Duncan try to make lo—

MEG. I've got to go.

LEO. Not yet.

MEG. I need Maxine! I have to talk to her!

LEO. Maxine?!

MEG. I have to find her right now!

LEO. Oh no. No no. No no. No no. Wait!

(Too late. MEG is gone. As LEO runs after her, DUNCAN ENTERS jovially, carrying a telegram.)

DUNCAN. Why hello there, Leo.

LEO. You're early. Go away and come back.

(LEO runs out to the garden, following MEG, leaving DUNCAN alone in the room. DUNCAN is in high spirits.)

DUNCAN. "Go away and come back." Ha! I knew I was right.

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Why look at this. It's another telegram — and it just arrived. *(He kisses the telegram with a big smack. "Mwa!")* "Apologize for delay. Stop. General strike at fault. Stop. Will arrive at eight fifteen tonight. Stop. Maxine and Stephanie." Ha! Ha! Ha! Oh, Justice is sweet, sayeth the Lord, hallelujah!

(JACK now ENTERS from the bedroom at the top of the stairs, still in his party gown, looking as sexy as all get out. He sees DUNCAN, kicks the door shut and drapes himself along the doorframe.)

JACK. ... Hello, big boy.

DUNCAN. I beg your pardon.

JACK. Is that a chopstick in your pocket or are you just glad to see me?

DUNCAN. Are you speaking to me?

JACK. Oh, yes.

DUNCAN. Well don't bother.

JACK. Fine, fine. No words, just action, is that your game? Well go ahead, mister! I'm ready for you! *(He poses with his dress hiked up above his knee. When DUNCAN isn't looking, he gives a high sign to the screen, believing that LEO is behind it. DUNCAN turns and just stares at him.)* What's the matter?

DUNCAN. The matter? Nothing's the matter for me. No-o-o. But it is for you. I have a surprise.

JACK. Here it comes.

DUNCAN. A big surprise.

JACK. Now you're just bragging.

DUNCAN. In fact, I have two surprises.

JACK. You have two of them?

DUNCAN. That's right. And they have long flowing hair.

JACK. Have you thought about surgery?

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DUNCAN. Don't change the subject!

(JACK covers his eyes with his hand and keeps them covered throughout the following:)

JACK. All right. Go ahead.

DUNCAN. You want to see it, eh? *(DUNCAN goes through his pockets, looking for the telegram.)* Wait a second... I'll get it out... Oh, damn, now I can't find it ...

JACK. You can't find it?

DUNCAN. Just give me a second ...

JACK. And you call this a big surprise?

DUNCAN. Here it is. I found it. *(He pulls out the telegram and holds it up. But JACK is still hiding his eyes.)* There. Do you see it?

JACK. No.

DUNCAN. You're not looking.

JACK. I can't.

DUNCAN. At least look at the signature.

JACK. It's signed?

DUNCAN. Of course it's signed! How else would you know where it came from?!

(BING BONG! The front doorbell rings.)

DUNCAN. It's them. I know it is. Ha! Here! Keep it as a souvenir!

JACK. A souvenir ...?

(DUNCAN stuffs the telegram into JACK's hand and EXITS. JACK hurries over to the screen to talk to LEO — who isn't there, of course — when DOC ENTERS. JACK puts the telegram into his sleeve and forgets about it.)

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DOC. Hello, gorgeous.

JACK. Ah! Oh, Doctor, thank God it's you. I just had the most awful experience!

DOC. Oh, you poor thing. You poor baby. You're upset, I can tell. Now you just sit down. Just tell your doctor aaaaah! about it.

(DOC starts making love to JACK, stroking his hair and cheek.)

JACK. ... What are you doing?

DOC. Am I doing something?

JACK. Yes, now stop it.

DOC. Stop it, she says. Stop it. Ha! Can I have a kiss?

JACK. No!

DOC. Ouch! Give me that hand! Oh, you have such interesting hands. For the record, I do electrolysis.

(DOC really goes after STEPHANIE, who wriggles away and starts crawling across the floor.)

JACK. Hey! Would you stop that! Stop it! Just-just-just- That's personal property!

DOC. Who said "Don't take no for an answer?"

JACK. I have no idea.

DOC. "You are my sunshine, my only sunshine."

JACK. I think you've had too much punch.

DOC. "I want to sit on your pulpit!"

JACK. You do?

DOC. You can't deny it. You feel just as I do! It was all there, in your letter.

JACK. My letter?

DOC. "Take me. Ravish me. Enter my house!"

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JACK. Leo! Come out already! It's time to come out! ... Oh, no. The screen! There's nobody behind the screen!

DOC. Good idea. We can do it back there.

(He drags JACK behind the screen.)

JACK. No!

DOC. Please! Darling. Stephanie. I'm on my knees. *(He realizes he's not, so he drops to his knees and takes JACK's hand.)* Marry me.

(At this moment, BUTCH and AUDREY burst into the room having a fight.)

BUTCH. I can't believe you want to break up!

AUDREY. Butch I'm really sorry!

BUTCH. It's that Jack guy, isn't it? Oh, I'm gonna punch him—

AUDREY. Leave him alone!

BUTCH. I could have other girls, you know. Father wants me to marry Stephanie. And look at her! She's beautiful! Maybe I should marry her!

JACK. No, I really don't think — *(BUTCH kisses JACK.)* YAAAHAH!

DOC. Butch, listen to me. I know this may hurt you a little, but Stephanie and I are in love.

JACK. We are?

BUTCH. Father! You can't have her! She's mine now!

DOC. She wants me, Butch. Not you!

(And DOC kisses JACK.)

JACK. YAAAHAH! ... Would you two stop it!

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(JACK runs around the room pursued by DOC, BUTCH and AUDREY.)

DOC. Stephanie, darling, come back!
 BUTCH. Hey, leave her alone! She's mine!
 AUDREY. Butch, wait! ... Butch!

(They all run out of the room. As soon as they're gone, LEO ENTERS as MAXINE — just as MEG ENTERS from the other direction. She's extremely upset.)

MEG. Oh, Maxine! Where have you been?! I need to talk to you!

LEO. My dear, what's the matter?

MEG. I need your advice! I don't know what to do!

LEO. Now, now, just calm down and start at the beginning. And whatever it is: Follow your heart. It's always the way.

MEG. All right. It's about Leo. You know how well I've gotten to know him over the past few weeks and oh, I just think the world of him. He's gentle, and thoughtful, and ...

LEO. Kind and handsome. Go on, go on.

MEG. Well, tonight, while I was dancing with him, he... kissed me. And when he did, something totally unexpected happened. Inside me. And I realized, while I was kissing him... oh, I don't know how to say this.

LEO. Try, try.

MEG. I'm sure it's wrong.

LEO. Tell me.

MEG. Oh, I can't do it!

LEO. Margaret, tell me right now.

MEG. ... All right. *(They sit together on the sofa.)* While I was

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kissing him, I was... thinking about you. *(She leans amorously into Maxine.)* Maxine, I think I'm in love with you.

(Pause.)

LEO. ... No. You're not.

MEG. I think I am.

LEO. You are not! Oh, darling, you're just confused. I mean, of course Leo and I are similar in some ways ...

MEG. Like two halves of the same apple! I mean, do I love him at all? Yes of course I do. He's funny and kind and ...

LEO. Sexy?

MEG. Well I guess a little bit. But the thing is, I love you more! I guess it's wrong, but it just feels, when you're not around me, that something is missing. I wouldn't have dared say anything, but I know you feel the same way. I know it. I can see it sometimes when you look at me. Sort of cross-eyed with your mouth hanging open.

LEO. No, that's just me.

MEG. Maxine, I'm being very brave and you aren't helping me!

LEO. I will help you, just listen! Life can be complicated. Right now it's extremely complicated. For reasons that have nothing to do with you.

MEG. You don't love me, do you?

LEO. Of course I love you —

MEG. But not the same way.

LEO. Well not exactly —

MEG. Oh, Maxine, I shouldn't have told you. I should just marry Duncan.

LEO. No, you shouldn't!

MEG. I'll never mention it again.

LEO. Mention it, please —

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MEG. I am so sorry!

(She kisses MAXINE on the cheek and MEG runs up the stairs and into her room.)

LEO. No. Meg, wait —! Wait!

(She's gone. At which point, JACK ENTERS still dressed as Stephanie, but completely disheveled.)

JACK. Where the hell were you! You weren't there! Behind the screen! And I was attacked!

LEO. By Duncan?

JACK. No! By Doctor Lust, Monster of Medicine. He thought the letter was for him.

LEO. Why?

JACK. How should I know! Duncan must have thought I was insane.

LEO. Did he try anything?

JACK. No, he stuffed a telegram in my hand. Maybe, for a minister, that's foreplay.

LEO. What telegram? What did it say?

JACK. I don't know! I didn't read it!

LEO. Do you still have it?

JACK. I guess... Yes, here it is. So what?

LEO. "Apologize for delay. Stop."

JACK. "General strike at fault. Stop."

LEO. "Will arrive at eight fifteen tonight. Stop."

JACK. "Maxine and Stephanie."

LEO & JACK. ... YAHHHHH!

LEO. Eight fifteen! That's in five minutes! What do we do?!

JACK. Get the hell out of here!

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LEO. But I can't leave Meg.

JACK. Forget about Meg! We're about to get arrested as women! They'd put us in a woman's prison. With female truck drivers with tight t-shirts and tattoos! ... Well, maybe that's not so bad...

LEO. Wait a second. If we're men, we're in the clear.

JACK. What do you mean?

LEO. When the girls arrive, everybody will be looking for the first Maxine and Stephanie. So we have to change and become Leo and Jack again!

JACK. Good idea.

DUNCAN. *(Off.)* Florence, just don't ask questions!

LEO & JACK. ... Duncan

(They hide under the stairs, as DUNCAN ENTERS at a run from the garden, pulling Florence along with him.)

DUNCAN. Oh, damn, I thought I saw them in here.

FLORENCE. Duncan, what are you doing?!

DUNCAN. All right, listen. The women you know as Maxine and Stephanie are frauds. The real ones are arriving tonight.

FLORENCE. How do you know?

DUNCAN. A telegram just arrived. And there was one before that.

FLORENCE. Let me see them.

DUNCAN. I don't have them right now.

FLORENCE. Oh, please —

DUNCAN. It's the truth!

(Bing bong! The front doorbell rings.)

DUNCAN. It's them. It has to be. Come on!

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FLORENCE. Ah!

(DUNCAN pulls FLORENCE off at breakneck speed. As soon as DUNCAN and FLORENCE are gone, LEO and JACK come out of hiding. Simultaneously, MEG ENTERS from her bedroom, at the top of the stairs. She sees the men from above, but they don't see her.)

JACK. Oh, God in heaven. It's incredible! Just look at us! Two grown men dressed as women!

(Both men pull off their wigs. MEG reels backward against the wall, then clings onto the banister, peering down through the rails.)

JACK. I'm wearing a dress, for God's sake. And a petticoat! And lace knickers! With little flowers on them! I think they're peonies!

(AUDREY now ENTERS from down the hall. She starts to say something to MEG, but MEG silences her and points over the balcony to the men below.)

JACK. If my mother ever saw me like this, I'd kill myself!

(AUDREY takes it in — and swoons into MEG's arms. MEG pushes her back to her feet.)

JACK. Oh, how did I ever let you talk me into this?

LEO. You weren't complaining for the last four weeks, while you were slobbering over Audrey.

JACK. Well what about you? If I hadn't gone along with all this, you wouldn't have met Meg.

LEADING LADIES

LEO. Well that's true. Except now she says she's attracted to Maxine.

JACK. Attracted?

LEO. Attracted.

(AUDREY turns and looks at Meg... then inches away from her.)

JACK. But you're not even pretty as a girl.

LEO. Look who's talking!

JACK. Well, I can't be too bad, because two men just kissed me on the lips!

(The women react.)

LEO. Look, that's not the point! The point is, I'm in love with Meg. She is the greatest woman that ever walked this earth. I don't care if she's slow, I don't care if she's gullible, I don't even mind that squint she has in the one eye. I'm in love with her.

JACK. Gee, that's really nice, it's a lovely thought, I know just how you feel BUT I NEED MY CLOTHES!

LEO. All right, all right! Come on. We'll both change, then find the girls and tell them everything. But we have to do it just right, because this whole thing makes them look really, really stupid.

(The men EXIT and the women head down the stairs.)

MEG. *(Beyond furious — ready to eat nails.)* I'll kill him. I'm going to kill him!

AUDREY. I think we should kill all four of them! ... Oh. I get it, I get it.

MEG. Unh!

LEADING LADIES

AUDREY. But, you know, when I think about all they've been going through just to spend a little time with us, I'm incredulous. That means —

MEG. Shut up!

AUDREY. Yeah! I'm gonna shut up now!

MEG. I can't believe I shared a bedroom with him for four weeks! *(A horrible thought suddenly strikes her.)* Oh my God. He saw me in my... curlers! *(She's seething now.)* Revenge. I want revenge!

(MEG EXITS in a fury into the garden.)

AUDREY. *(Calling.)* Yeah! Me, too!

(At which moment, JACK hurries in from the kitchen, dressed as himself.)

JACK. Audrey!

AUDREY. Jack!

JACK. Listen. There's something I have to tell you.

AUDREY. Well, I have something to — !

JACK. Please don't interrupt. *(He takes a breath and it all pours out.)* I did something terrible. It all started a month ago. Leo and I were on a train.

(AUDREY reacts as if to say "no kidding".)

JACK. Well you know that. And we read about Florence dying and leaving her money to Max and Steve. And by this time I had met you and all I wanted to do was take you in my arms. But then you told us her nephews were Maxine and Stephanie, and you see we're actors and we had these costumes and so... well the fact is, we

LEADING LADIES

dressed up as women!

AUDREY. No!

JACK. Yes! I was that beautiful creature. Stephanie. It was me.

AUDREY. Wow!

JACK. I know, but I didn't mean to make you look stupid. I— I did it because of your thighs. I mean your eyes. I wanted to be with every inch of you. Your lips. Your forehead. And I wanted your bust. I mean your trust. And I want a home so badly. A real home with a picket fence, and a gate, and little Audreys skating to school every morning. And so I lay my soul at your feet and I ask — nay, I beg — your forgiveness. *(He kneels before her.)* Audrey, will you marry me?

AUDREY. You are the most obstreperous, abominable, loathsome, odious, deplorable, despicable, obnoxious, vile, detestable man I have ever met! And of course I'll marry you! You just had to ask! Now give us a hug!

(She grabs him, they hug and run off. The moment they're gone, LEO and MEG ENTER from opposite directions. LEO is now in his suit, as LEO. MEG plays it cool, enjoying her revenge to the hilt.)

LEO. Meg!

MEG. Leo, listen to me, I have to talk to you!

LEO. Well I have something to tell you too.

MEG. Let me go first, it's important. After I left you on the dance floor, I went to see Maxine. I was confused, and oh, I said some silly things, but while I was with her, she gave me some very good advice. She told me that I should follow my heart. And now that I've had a chance to think, I know exactly what she meant. So I'm marrying Duncan tomorrow morning.

LEO. Huh?

LEADING LADIES

MEG. "Follow your heart." I made a commitment to him. That's what she meant. She wants me to marry him.

LEO. No, she doesn't.

MEG. That was her way of reminding me that honor and trust are so important!

LEO. No they're not! That's not what she meant!

MEG. Leo. Thank you for everything. Good-bye.

(She kisses him sadly on the cheek and starts to go. She has to do this, but now it's breaking her heart.)

LEO. No! Wait! Look, look, look! Wait, wait! Look! Wait! Look! I'll go find Maxine and she'll tell you exactly what she thinks.

MEG. I know what she thinks.

LEO. No you don't! I mean, you-you-you think you know ...

MEG. I'm sorry, Leo.

LEO. Please. Please! Just one more chance! Let her talk to you! Please!

MEG. ... All right. I'll give her one minute to come in here and tell me what she thinks. And if she isn't here by then I'm marrying Duncan. Oh, and I want you to be here too. You and Maxine together. Then we'll get it all straightened out.

LEO. Together?

MEG. That's right.

LEO. Together! Right! One minute! Me and Leo. Me and Maxine! I'll find her. And mail her. Bring her. We'll be here! *(He dashes off through the garden. Off:)* Shit!

(At that moment, DUNCAN and FLORENCE ENTER from the hall.)

DUNCAN. Margaret! We've been looking all over for you. I'm afraid I have some rather distressing news.

LEADING LADIES

FLORENCE. Don't listen to him! He's an idiot.

DUNCAN. Florence, please. Margaret, I now have conclusive proof that the two women who have been here for the past four weeks posing as Maxine and Stephanie are not your cousins.

MEG. *(Sadly.)* I know that, Duncan.

DUNCAN. You do? How?

MEG. It doesn't matter.

DUNCAN. Oh. Well, I do have some good news. Your real cousins have just arrived. They're in the garden.

FLORENCE. And I don't particularly like them!

DUNCAN. That's not the point! And Meg, listen, I've spoken to them and they're willing to take only \$100,000 each and go back to England. We'll have the rest for the Foundation! Now as soon as the police arrive, this will all be over.

MEG. *(Alarmed.)* The police? What for?

DUNCAN. To arrest Maxine and Stephanie. That is, the supposed ones.

FLORENCE. I told him not to do it!

DUNCAN. Florence, they have deceived you.

FLORENCE. But I like them, Duncan!

DUNCAN. Well I'm sorry, but they have broken the law! They have made a mockery of your entire household and they should not be rewarded for their... theatrical behavior. So typical of actors, it's always me, me, me, look at me!

(At this moment, we hear the whine of a siren as a police car screeches to a halt in the driveway.)

DUNCAN. Oh, good! Now all I have to do is find them and hand them over.

MEG. Duncan! Wait! I saw one of them in the front yard! Just now!

LEADING LADIES

DUNCAN. Which one?!

MEG. Stephanie. And Maxine. They were both there.

DUNCAN. I'll be right back!

(He runs off. The moment he's gone, LEO hurries in dressed as MAXINE, but slightly askew, since everything has been pulled on in such a hurry.)

LEO. Darling girl, there you are! Now listen, you misunderstood me. I want you to marry Leo, that divine young man — and he's right outside. *(Calling.)* Come in, darling! ... What?! What's that you said?! *(To MEG.)* Oh no! He's hurt his leg! I'll send him in. You stay right here.

MEG. Leo —

(He runs off and now plays both parts, putting his head around the door as necessary.)

LEO. *(Off — as LEO.)* Meg, I'm right out here! I've hurt my leg and I can't come in! *(Off — as MAXINE.)* Of course you can, just put a little weight on it. *(Off — as LEO.)* Ow, that really hurts!

(He pops his head around the door, without the wig and with his jacket on, as LEO. The more he can pop in and out as the two characters and make this a tour de force, as in "The Mystery of Irma Vep" and other similar plays, the better. It should build to a fever pitch.)

LEO. *(As LEO.)* Here I am, Meg! Now Maxine says you should marry me — but I've hurt my leg so I'll let her do all the talking. Bye!

MEG. Leo —

LEADING LADIES

LEO. *(Off — as Maxine.)* Oh you brave young man! Of course she should marry you and not Duncan! *(Off — as LEO.)* Then go inside and tell her! *(Off — as MAXINE.)* I'll do it right now!

MEG. Leo —!

(He runs back on as Maxine.)

LEO. I'm right here! Here I am! Now Meg, you really must marry Leo. He's such a lovely boy, and so handsome and —

MEG. Leo, stop it!

LEO. Leo? *(Beat; then he calls through the door:)* Leo, she's talking to you so listen carefully!

MEG. Would you please just stop it! I know it's you! I know you're Leo! And that Stephanie is Jack! I know everything!

LEO. You do?

MEG. Yes! Now get out of here, fast. The police are here!

LEO. But I can't leave you.

MEG. You have to! You'll be arrested!

LEO. Meg, I love you.

MEG. I know that! And I love you!

LEO. You do?

MEG. Yes.

LEO. Will you marry me?

MEG. Yes!

(He's about to kiss her, but stops abruptly.)

LEO. Wait! I came here to take your money.

MEG. I know that!

(They kiss. Another really great kiss.)

LEADING LADIES

FLORENCE. If I were you, I'd get the hell out of here.
 LEO. (To FLORENCE.) Aren't you even a little surprised?
 FLORENCE. Why? Because I'm old? Now listen carefully. Old:
 smart. Young: nitwits. Now go!
 LEO. Right.

(LEO pulls his wig on and rushes to the garden doors — and runs
 straight into DUNCAN.)

DUNCAN. Aha! Gotcha!
 MEG. Oh, no.

(Beat — then LEO transforms himself right back into MAXINE.)

LEO. Duncan. My dear old friend. How delightful to see you
 again. "Ah, the friends thou hast, grapple them to thy soul with hoops
 of steel."

DUNCAN. How very apt. Because you're under arrest.

(JACK ENTERS.)

JACK. Hey. What's going on?
 MEG. Duncan, let her go!
 DUNCAN. I will not! She's a fraud!
 MEG. But wait a second! What if she's the real one and the
 ones outside aren't genuine?
 DUNCAN. Margaret, please. You admitted she was a fraud, not
 five minutes ago. You may like this creature, but your real cousins
 are in the garden waiting for you!

(From the garden, we hear voices and gunshots.)

LEADING LADIES

A WOMAN'S VOICE. (Off.) AHHHHHHHHH! (They all look
 up.) Leave me alone! Get your hands off me! Stop it!

(BANG!)

A SECOND WOMAN'S VOICE. (Off.) Get away from me!
 Do you hear me?!

(BANG! BANG!)

MEN'S and WOMEN'S VOICES. (Off.) Grab 'em! Hold 'em!
 Ahhhh! I got 'em! Ahhhhhh!

(BANG! BANG!)

A MAN'S VOICE. (Off.) Quiet down! You're under arrest!

(AUDREY rushes in from the garden, with BUTCH and DOC
 trailing behind. They're crazed with excitement.)

AUDREY. Oh my gosh! The most incredible thing just hap-
 pened! I'm out there talking to these two women, and they tell me
 their names are Maxine and Stephanie. And my jaw, it hits the floor,
 ya know?! Then out of the blue two policemen show up and then
 whamo! They take one look at these women and go "Aha! Trixie
 McCall! Bubbles Schaeffer! Hands up!" Then the girls make a run
 for it, and the policemen knock 'em down! It turns out the girls are
 well-known crooks! They sent a telegram and pretended to be your
 nieces just to get your money! Can you imagine?!

LEO. Oh, this wicked, wicked world.

DUNCAN. Oh, no.

MEG. Duncan. I believe you owe "Maxine" an apology.

LEADING LADIES

LEO. No, no, please. Don't. We all make mistakes. It is forgiveness that makes the world a better place. Reverend Wooley got a little confused, and don't we all sometimes?

MEG. Yes, we do.

AUDREY. Yeah. Tell me about it. Hey Jack.

(She kisses JACK on the lips. A great kiss.)

DUNCAN. Audrey!

LEO. Now it's our turn.

(MAXINE kisses MEG.)

DUNCAN. Margaret!!

MEG. Oh, stop it. We should tell him the truth.

DUNCAN. Tell me what?!

LEO. *(As MAXINE.)* Margaret and I are getting married.

DUNCAN. AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

DOC. Don't you get any ideas, Florence. You're too old for me.

(There's no answer. They all look at FLORENCE. She's slumped over in her chair.) Florence ...? Florence! *(Everyone freezes. DOC tries to get a pulse at her neck, but there is none. He feels her hands. They're stone cold. DOC goes white.)* She's gone.

MEG. Oh, no ...

AUDREY. Florence ...

(Everyone is in shock. MEG takes LEO's hand. DOC shakes his head sadly.)

FLORENCE. ... You are the worst doctor that ever lived.

(Shock, then cries of relief, as everyone clusters around her,

LEADING LADIES

jubilant.)

MEG/AUDREY/BUTCH/JACK. Aunt Florence!/You're alive!/
You really had us scared that time/Oh, Lord ...

(A bell sounds.)

AUDREY. Oh my gosh. It's time for the show!

LEO. Places, everyone! Act One places! Let's go!

(Everyone scurries around to prepare for the play, moving furniture and pulling a costume basket in from the kitchen. During the following, the actors pull costume pieces from the basket and put them on.)

EVERYONE. The chair! Put it here!/ We need the hats!/I've got mine./What about the wig?/Where's my sword! I need my sword!/
My line! I can't remember my first line!

(Meanwhile, LEO and MEG have a moment alone together, and we hear them over the words above.)

LEO. What did you mean that "maybe" I was a little sexy?

MEG. I was just teasing. Because I knew it was you all along.

LEO. You did not!

MEG. I did so! From the moment you walked through the door, I knew there was something funny going on because

(He stops her mouth with a kiss.)

JACK. Would you two stop it! We have a show to put on!

LEO. I'm ready!