

# LEADING LADIES

a new play by

**Ken Ludwig**

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## Characters

Meg	Duncan
Leo	Florence
Jack	Doc
Audrey	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 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.

## Act One

### Scene One

The handsome, spacious living room of a beautiful, well-appointed house in York, Pennsylvania in the spring of 1958.

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 capitol of the United 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.

Duncan? ... Duncan?!

MEG

(off)  
Coming!

DUNCAN

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 scatter-brained, 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.)