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Cast of Characters

PEER GYNT
ASE
ASLAK
MADS MOEN
FATHER MOEN
MOTHER MOEN
A YOUTH

Youths:
YOUTH 1
YOUTH 2
YOUTH 3

Boys:
BOY 1
BOY 2
A GIRL

Girls:
GIRL 1
GIRL 2
GIRL 3

SOLVEIG
SOLVEIG'S FATHER
LISEL
INGRID
WOMAN IN GREEN
A TROLL
TROLLS
TROLL KING
TROLL COURTIER
THE INVISIBLE HAND
KARI
OLD HAG
UGLY BOY
CAPTAIN
OLD PEER
MIDDLE-AGED PEER
HERR TRUMPETSTALE
MONSIEUR BALLOON

MR. COTTON
ANITRA
SLAVEGIRLS
THE WATCH
HELMSMAN
BO'SUN
COOK
BEGRIFFENFELDTS
BEGRIFFENFELDT 1
A VOICE
ACADEMICS
THE FELLAH
HUSSEIN
MADMEN
CANCER

Teenagers:
TEENAGER 1
TEENAGER 2
TEENAGER 3

COIN INSPECTOR

PEER GYNT

adapted by David Henry Hwang
and Stephan Müller

FROM THE PLAY BY HENRIK IBSEN

ACT I

Scene 1

(Gynt family farm. PEER GYNT, 20, enters, followed by his mother, ASE.)

ASE. That's a lie!

PEER. Is not!

ASE. You're a liar!

PEER. Am not!

ASE. Don't you have any shame? Lying to your own mother! First, while the rest of us are breaking our backs, you go trotting off to the mountains, on a reindeer hunt. When you come back — where's the deer? What happened to your clothes? And where the devil is your gun? You have the nerve to answer with some fish story that wouldn't fool a two year-old.

(Pause.)

So, where'd you find this wonderful buck?

PEER. West of Gjendin.

ASE. West of Gjendin.

PEER. The blizzard so strong, I was fighting off sleep. The sleep of death. Then I saw — brown — a hoof — pawing at green — some moss.

ASE. You're dreaming.

PEER. And blood starts to pump back into my brain. I hear scraping, see the razor-sharp tips of his antlers. Feel myself moving — on my belly, through the thick white curtain. And

then I see him — all of him, like a vision — the perfect buck — so tall and fat.

ASE. How fat?

PEER. Kablam! My gun fires! Whomp! He goes down. Now *I'm* the animal — leaping onto his back. Grabbing his left ear — got'cha! My knife, poised in midair, ready to strike his neck with the finishing blow...

(Pause.)

Oh, God! Mother! He bellows! And leaps onto his feet. Rearing up on his hind legs, flinging my knife out of my reach! Before I can think, his antlers, they're pinning my hips — Jesus, the pain! — squeezing me, like a vice, against his body. I'm thrashing helplessly, a rag-doll. Both of us still in this position, he jumps up, then takes off along the ridge of Gjendin!

ASE. Oh my god!

PEER. A sheer drop, one — no, three, five thousand feet into oblivion. Just as I start to gather my wits — squawk! A wild rooster explodes from a cave, feathers everywhere, blinding the beast. The buck, startled, leaps off into...into...

ASE. Dear Jesus!

PEER. Into thin air! We're falling straight down, plummeting through the abyss. Above us, sheer rock wall zooming by. Beneath us, certain annihilation. Falling through a curtain of clouds, even parting a flock of seagulls! And still we continue — down, down — until, what's that coming towards us from beneath? It looks...like a reindeer's belly. Mother, I was seeing our reflection, in the waters below, rushing towards the horrible collision!

ASE. So what happened? *What happened?!*

PEER. Buck above, buck below — crash into each other, kicking up icy waters, vomiting foam. Both of us still struggling, scratching — barely conscious. Until somehow, we find ourselves heading for shore.

(Pause.)

And now, can you believe it? Here I am.

ASE. And the buck?

PEER. The buck? Probably someplace with *his* mother.

(Beat.)

If you find him, take a shot at him for me.

(Silence.)

ASE. Wait. Just one minute. That old tale — Dear God, you lie like your father! Yes! Gudbrand Glesne — you weasel, that was his story, not yours!

PEER. Maybe it happened to *both* of us. They say history repeats itself. You know, if anybody but my own mother accused me of that, I'd rip out his throat.

ASE. Go ahead! I'd know more peace six feet under than I do living with a bum like you.

PEER. Oh, my pretty little Mommy. When you're right, you're right. How 'bout a smile for your baby boy?

ASE. Get your hands off me! Smile? Why? Because my son's a pig? Because I'm a broken-old widow? No, hags like me frown day and night — each hour brings me some new insult.

(Pause.)

It wasn't always like this. When your grandfather died, he left us sacks of money. But your father — Mr. High-On-the-Hog — pissed away old Rasmus Gynt's fortune. And *then* had the nerve to drop dead. So where is that fortune now? Where is the property?

PEER. (*Imitating her:*) "Where have all the flowers gone?"

ASE. Don't talk back to your mother, young man. Half-man, half-sloth.

PEER. You say that now. But you'll eat those words. Someday, when I — when I do something...amazing!

ASE. You?

PEER. Anything's possible.

ASE. You can start by mending that rip in your pants.

PEER. Mother? Someday, I will be...a king, an emperor.

ASE. Not that again! Just like your father, you piss away every opportunity. That Haegstad girl, for instance—

PEER. Ingrid?

ASE. She liked you. There was a fruit ripe for the picking. Property, a title. If you'd only applied yourself a little, you'd be lord of a manner today — instead of a filthy beggar in torn, stinking rags.

PEER. OK, I'll do it.

ASE. What?

PEER. I'll do it. I'm going to Haegstad.

ASE. You pitiful creature. Another future, spilled onto the dust.

PEER. What are you—?

ASE. While you were flying on your magic reindeer, she got herself engaged to Mads Moen.

PEER. Mads Moen! Ingrid would never sell herself so short!

ASE. Yes, they're practically married already.

PEER. We'll see about that. Let's harness up the horse and cart.

ASE. Peer, forget it! The wedding's tomorrow!

PEER. Great. That leaves me a whole evening.

ASE. You are not going to do this! If you show up, I'll be a laughing-stock.

PEER. This will be great.

(He picks her up.)

ASE. Put me down! Now!

PEER. It's a wedding, and I am carrying you over the threshold!

ASE. I'm not kidding, Peer! Down!

PEER. You, with your sweetest mama's tongue, you have a chat with Ingrid's father. Tell him, tell him Mads Moen is a little doughboy who runs from his own shadow.

ASE. Now! Down!

PEER. And then, tell him Peer Gynt is — a real man.

ASE. I'll tell him, all right. I'll tell him you learned your manners from the devil himself!

PEER. You wouldn't!

ASE. When I'm through, he'll sick his dogs on you, like the scavenging wolf you are!

(Pause.)

I'll tell him everything, give me half a chance.

(He lifts her onto the roof.)

ASE. Carry me down! I'll hogtie you myself! Let me down — or you'll be sorry, Peer!

(PEER exits.)

ASE. Peer? ...Jesus Christ, he's actually —! Hey, you! Reindeer boy! Windbag! Son — come back here!

(Pause.)

I don't believe — he's strolling across the fields.

(Shouting:)

Help! Someone help me down! I'm getting dizzy!

Scene 2

(A small hill. Peer enters along a footpath, approaches a fence.)

PEER. There's Haegstad farm — won't be long now.

(Starts to climb the fence, stops.)

If only I could find Ingrid alone — away from all those drunken blowhards.

(Picks leaves off a bush:)

Actually, I could use a drink myself. If only I were invisible. Or a mysterious stranger. No, a few drinks would be best. Like a suit of armor — laughter and insults just bounce off!

(Lies on his back, stares at the sky:)

What a weird-looking cloud. Like ... a horse. Yes, with a rider — there's the saddle — and sort of a bridle. And chasing him? It's a wicked old witch, on her broomstick.

(Laughing:)

It's Mother! She's screaming, "You pig! Get me down from here!"

(He closes his eyes. ASLAK the blacksmith enters, with two BOYS.)

ASLAK. Well, if it isn't Peer Gynt — the village idiot!

PEER. *(Waking up:)* Call me emperor. Baron. Kaiser!

ASLAK. Get up off your ass, boy.

PEER. Oh, Blacksmith — didn't I teach you not to mess with me?

ASLAK. *(To friends:)* He must be talking about last time, when I beat the stuffing out of him!

PEER. Now, move along, if you know what's good for you!

ASLAK. Oh, I will. But first — I'm curious, where you been hiding since our little scuffle? That was almost six weeks ago. Wait, lemme guess. You were kidnapped by trolls!

PEER. Aslak, if only you knew. I've done...amazing things.

ASLAK. Well, don't be modest, boy. Out with it!

PEER. I wouldn't waste breath on you.

(Pause.)

ASLAK. Well, then — where you headed? Haegstad?

PEER. No.

ASLAK. They say *you* could've been the one walking down the aisle — if you'd kept your eye on the ball!

PEER. You're disgusting!

BOY 1. Don't despair just 'cuz Ingrid dumped you — there'll be a lot more skirts at the wedding feast.

BOY 2. For Jon Gynt's son? Hell, all the old maids and cross-eyed widows in the county will come running!

PEER. Go to hell!

ASLAK. Even a loser should be able to find *someone!* Well, do what you like. I'll give the bride a kiss for you.

(ASLAK and friends exit, laughing.)

PEER. The Haegstad girl — that scrawny milkmaid — I was the one who dumped her, not the other way around!

(Looks around.)

Hey, who's there? Who's laughing?

(Examines the bushes.)

I must be getting tired. I think I'll go home to mother.

(Dancers enter. Peer is drawn into the scene.)

Scene 3

(The courtyard at Haegstad. GUESTS dancing. MADS MOEN, the groom, stands knocking pitifully on a locked door, as his FATHER watches.)

MADS MOEN. Ingrid? Ingrid? Father, she won't — she's so stubborn!

FATHER MOEN. Won't *what*?

MADS MOEN. She's locked herself inside — look!

FATHER MOEN. So go and find the key?

MADS MOEN. I don't know where to look.

FATHER MOEN. Christ, you are such a retard!

(A YOUTH enters, approaches the dancers.)

A YOUTH. Hey — Peer Gynt is here!

EVERYONE. Peer Gynt?

ASLAK. Who said he could come? *(Beat.)* Who said he could come?

GIRLS. No one!

ASLAK. *(To GIRLS:)* If he tries to talk to you, just ignore him.

A GIRL. No, let's pretend we can't even see him!

(PEER enters, faces the girls.)

PEER. OK, which one of you really knows how to shake your hips?

ASLAK. I do!

(GIRLS laugh, scatter.)

PEER. Hey, c'mon — where're the party girls?

A YOUTH. Find 'em yourself!

(Suddenly depressed, PEER tries to socialize with one group after another, but they all go silent at his approach. SOLVEIG enters, with her FATHER. PEER approaches them.)

PEER. *(To SOLVEIG'S FATHER:)* May I have a dance with your daughter?

SOLVEIG'S FATHER. First things first. We must pay our respects to the hosts.

SOLVEIG. But thank you for asking.

(SOLVEIG and FATHER exit.)

A YOUTH. Leave them alone, Peer! They're new in town!

(ASLAK and two BOYS approach PEER.)

BOY 1. Hey, Peer — leaving so soon?

PEER. No — no, I'm not.

BOY 2. Then what're you going that way for?

ASLAK. You can't leave without joining us for a round.

PEER. Huh? No, I'm not thirsty.

(ASLAK's group moves along. PEER looks to where SOLVEIG exited.)

PEER. She's...she's an angel. Like no one I've ever seen before. I'll bet she's never told a lie in all her life.

(SOLVEIG enters.)

SOLVEIG. You're the boy who wanted to dance?

PEER. Yes, yes I am! You remembered me.

(Takes her hand.)

C'mon — let's get out of here.

SOLVEIG. Not too far, father said.

PEER. "Father said, father said?" Do you suck your thumb, too?

SOLVEIG. Now you're making fun of—

PEER. Look at you, you're still a child.

SOLVEIG. I was confirmed a whole year ago.

PEER. Excuse me, I'm sorry. Look, why don't we introduce ourselves, and start all over?

SOLVEIG. My name is Solveig. And you are...?

PEER. Peer.

SOLVEIG. Who?

PEER. Peer Gynt.

SOLVEIG. Oh dear.

PEER. What's wrong?

SOLVEIG. I'm sorry, I've got to go.

(She exits. MADS MOEN enters, with his FATHER and MOTHER.)

MADS MOEN. Mama, she won't.

MOTHER MOEN. What won't she do?

MADS MOEN. She just...won't.

MOTHER MOEN. Won't what?

MADS MOEN. She won't open the door!

FATHER MOEN. I'd like to lock you up — in a kennel.

MOTHER MOEN. *(To FATHER:)* That's the last thing he needs at a time like this!

(To MADS:)

Smart boy, you'll think of something.

(MAD'S FATHER and MOTHER exit. YOUTHS and GIRLS enter.)

YOUTH 1. Hey, Peer — how 'bout some whiskey?

PEER. No thanks.

YOUTH 1. It's good stuff.

PEER. You really got some?

YOUTH 1. (*Producing a flask:*) Guess I do!

(Takes a hit.)

Whooh! Stuff'll burn the hair off your balls!

PEER. Gimme some of that!

(He drinks.)

YOUTH 2. Hey, hey — what about mine?

PEER. No, just one —

YOUTH 2. Jesus, you are such a wimp! C'mon — bottom's up!

PEER. Just one more.

(Peer drinks.)

GIRL 1. (*To GIRLS:*) Let's go, before they're swinging from the trees.

PEER. What's wrong? Scared of me?

GIRL 1. Yeah, nothing's more scary than your face.

GIRL 2. Peer, are you a sorcerer?

PEER. Sure I am. The devil himself comes when I call.

YOUTH 3. My grandfather pulled rabbits out of a hat.

PEER. Listen, you. The things I can do, this world has not seen. Once, for instance, I trapped Satan inside a nutshell. Forced him in through a wormhole.

GIRL 3. Sure, how else?

PEER. He begged, he swore, he said he'd give me...anything on earth.

YOUTH 2. But you couldn't be bought off!

PEER. That's right! I stopped up the hole with a hair from my chest! You should've heard him in there, screaming and crying—

GIRL 2. We can imagine!

PEER. Like a fly, buzzing for dear life.

LISEL. And you've still got him in there — right now?

PEER. The devil got away. To tell you the truth, it's his fault Aslak hates me.

CROWD. What do you mean?

PEER. I went to old smithee. "Hey, buddy, could you smash this shell to dust?" "No problem," he says. Let's face it, Aslak may be strong as a bull, but thinking ain't exactly his specialty. He takes his hammer —

GIRL 3. Did he smash up the devil?

PEER. Takes his hammer, sends it crashing down. Then Satan throws up a fountain of flame that explodes through the roof! When the smoke clears, the devil's gone!

LISEL. And Aslak — what happened to him?

PEER. He's standing there, both hands fried to a crisp. And since that day, he's never forgiven me.

(Crowd looks at ASLAK's bandaged hands.)

CROWD. Is it true?

ASLAK. Of course it's not true, you idiots!

CROWD. Show us your hands!

ASLAK. I'll show you my fists, if you don't shut up.

(The crowd disperses. MADS crosses to PEER.)

PEER. But I've done even greater things.

MADS MOEN. Peer, is that true? You can command the devil himself?

PEER. Sure, Mads. Every last word. I'm the man of mystery.

MADS MOEN. And do you possess the Cloak of Invisibility?

PEER. It's a hat!

(SOLVEIG enters. PEER rushes to her, swings her through the air.)

PEER. Solveig!

SOLVEIG. Let go of me!

PEER. But why?

SOLVEIG. You're so...wild.

PEER. Like a stag bounding through the hills. Oh c'mon, you're so beautiful, don't sulk.

SOLVEIG. *(Pulls free.)* I'm sorry, I can't.

PEER. Why not?

SOLVEIG. Because — because you're drunk!

PEER. Yes, I *have* had too much to drink. But I was angry...you hurt my feelings. Please, let's go for a walk.

SOLVEIG. Even if I wanted to, I wouldn't dare.

PEER. What are you afraid of?

SOLVEIG. Father, mostly.

PEER. Your father. You've gotta take off his leash sooner or later. There's more to life than singing in the church choir.

SOLVEIG. What do you want me to say?

PEER. I saw your mother — don't think he's made her very happy. Don't you want to live? Haven't you ever wished you could take a chance, just once?

SOLVEIG. Stop talking! Just stop it!

PEER. Why should I?

(Then, lower:)

I'm going to turn into a vampire. I'll appear tonight at the foot of your bed. So when you feel something under the covers, don't try to pretend it's the cat. I'll sink my fangs into your neck, and suck out what little blood's left. And when you're all pale and breathless, you'll see for yourself what big teeth I have.

(Suddenly:)

Oh please, Solveig — dance with me!

SOLVEIG. They warned me not to talk with you!

(SOLVEIG exits.)

PEER. Those bastards — forced me to drink — I'll slit their throats, every last one!

(MADS moves again towards PEER.)

MADS. If anyone can get her out, it's you.

PEER. What are you babbling about?

MADS. My bride — she's locked herself in the storehouse.

PEER. Big deal.

MADS. Won't you just try? Please, please, please.

PEER. She's your problem.

(Then:)

Ingrid? In the storehouse, huh?

MADS. *(To PEER:)* If you help me, I'll give you an ox!

PEER. You got it!

(PEER goes to the storehouse door, knocks once.)

PEER. Ingrid?

(Then twice. The door opens. INGRID appears from within, pulls PEER into the storehouse, then closes the door behind them. MADS knocks on the door, finds it locked.)

MADS. Ingrid? Ingrid?

(Then MADS sees something off-stage.)

MADS. Oh god! Oh no! Father — come quickly! Mommy! Help!

(FATHER and MOTHER MOEN enter, with crowd.)

FATHER MOEN. What the devil —?

MADS. It's Peer Gynt! Look, look —!

(ASE enters.)

ASE. My son! What have you done to him?

MADS. He's — there he is, up on the hill!

CROWD. With the bride!

ASE. God, he's no better than an animal.

ASLAK. It's a sheer drop down — but he just keeps climbing. The man's a two-legged goat!

MADS. Look how he's carrying her — like a piece of meat!

ASE. *(Screaming to off-stage:)* I hope you fall and break your — Hey, watch out! Be careful!

PEER. Heads up!

(He tosses down her underpants. INGRID'S FATHER enters.)

INGRID'S FATHER. He's kidnapped my little girl! I'll have that hoodlum boiled in oil!

ASE. Over my dead body, you will!

(They all exit towards the hills, reciting a Norwegian war chant.)

CROWD. Give us blood! Give us blood!

Scene 4

(A path in the mountains. Early morning. PEER enters, INGRID pursuing him, her wedding dress disheveled.)

INGRID. Peer? Sweetheart? Darling?

PEER. Get away from me!

INGRID. After last night? What will become of me?

PEER. That's not my problem.

INGRID. You have abused me horribly.

PEER. You go your way, I'll go my way.

INGRID. But we are bound forever — by our sin.

PEER. To hell with your sins. To hell with all women. All except one.

INGRID. Which one's that?

PEER. It's not you.

INGRID. Who, then? Who is she?

PEER. None of your business! Now, go back to where you came from. Let your father walk you down the aisle.

INGRID. But, my love —

PEER. Don't use that word!

INGRID. You can't possibly mean what you're saying.

PEER. Then you don't know me at all.

INGRID. After you get what you want, you think you can toss me aside like your tarts?

PEER. What makes you any different?

INGRID. I can give you Haegstad farm — and everything that goes with it.

PEER. Can you go your whole life without telling a lie? Is your body a temple, one you treat with respect? Do your thoughts soar with angels, or lie down with the devil?

INGRID. What are you —?

PEER. Was it just a year ago you were confirmed?

INGRID. Stop and listen to me!

PEER. Do your eyes look right through me? Can you deny me, even when I beg?

INGRID. God, he's a raving lunatic.

PEER. Can the mere sight of you save a man from himself? Well? Can it?

INGRID. I don't know! But —

PEER. Then what good are you? Everything else is vanity.

INGRID. If you abandon me now, the penalty is death.

PEER. You begged me to do it to you!

INGRID. I was distraught!

PEER. Yeah? Well, so was I!

(PEER exits. INGRID calls after him.)

INGRID. You won't get away with this! I won't give up until they throw the book at you!

Scene 5

(By a mountain lake. ASE searches for PEER with SOLVEIG and her FATHER.)

ASE. Peer? Peer! Is that you up there?

(Pause.)

No, not a trace of him.

SOLVEIG'S FATHER. He's only postponing the inevitable.

ASE. He's wandering through the wilderness. A little lost lamb.

SOLVEIG'S FATHER. Yes, he is lost to the flock.

ASE. Don't pass judgment. You don't know him — his heart is so big. He'll do great things — if he only lives long enough.

SOLVEIG'S FATHER. He'd be better off sentenced to hang.

ASE. Jesus Christ!

SOLVEIG'S FATHER. Faced with the hangman, he might repent his sins. Our only purpose in life is to prepare for death.

ASE. Just help me find him.

SOLVEIG'S FATHER. I will, to save his soul.

ASE. And his neck!

SOLVEIG'S FATHER. Here — this looks like a track.

ASE. Yes, yes! Forgive me for snapping at you. Thank you for your help.

SOLVEIG'S FATHER. It is my Christian duty. Nothing personal.

(He exits, following the track.)

SOLVEIG. *(To ASE:)* Tell me more.

ASE. About my son?

SOLVEIG. Please. Tell me everything.

ASE. Everything? Young lady, won't you get bored?

SOLVEIG. You'll be bored from talking, long before I grow bored from listening.

(Then:)

Look — a man's footprint!

SOLVEIG'S FATHER. *(Entering:)* Come along! Now!

ASE. Bless you! Peer! Peer!

(They exit, following SOLVEIG'S FATHER.)

Scene 6

(The high mountains. PEER enters.)

PEER. This is life! The mob on my tail — every soul in the parish. Armed to the teeth with rifles and clubs! That old geezer from Haegstad leading the charge, howling for blood. The whole world's been alerted — Peer Gynt is one dangerous desperado! This is life! Every muscle as strong as a bear!

(Looks up.)

Those eagles — that's where I belong! Free to soar fast as my desires can take me. Over the oceans, to the shores of England. Hey, you stuck-up princess, you horsey-faced wench! If you want me, you'll have to shoot me down.

(Pause.)

My eagles — where'd they go? Peer Gynt, you were born for greatness, and at long last greatness has found thee!

(He runs head-first into a rock, knocking himself unconscious.)

Scene 7

(The same hillside, moments later. A WOMAN IN GREEN enters, sniffs the unconscious PEER. He stirs.)

PEER. Who are you?

(Pause.)

Who are you?

WOMAN IN GREEN. . I'm the daughter of the Dovre King.

PEER. Yeah? Well, I'm the son of a queen.

WOMAN IN GREEN. Is that true?

PEER. True as that my name's Peer. And true as that you are drop-dead gorgeous. Will you be mine? I know how to treat a lady.

WOMAN IN GREEN. My father's castle towers over the Ronde.

PEER. My mother's would tower over his.

WOMAN IN GREEN. When my father gets angry, the mountains tremble.

PEER. They fall apart if my mother only nags.

WOMAN IN GREEN. Then how come you're dressed in rags?

PEER. Oh, I only get decked-out on Sundays.

WOMAN IN GREEN. I wear silk and gold thread every day of the week.

PEER. Then how come all I see are grass and cow dung?

WOMAN IN GREEN. That's something you'll have to get used to here in Ronde. We believe that everything can be its opposite — depending on how you look at it. When you get to my father's place, unless you believe it's a palace, you'll probably think you're standing in a heap of compost!

PEER. Well, see, that's exactly how it works with us.

WOMAN IN GREEN. Black is white, and ugly is beautiful.

PEER. Big is little, and dirty is clean.

WOMAN IN GREEN. Ignorance is knowledge.

PEER. Blindness is vision.

WOMAN IN GREEN. Oh, Peer — you and I, we're a perfect fit!

PEER. Like a horse with her rider, a hand in its glove!

(They run off together.)

Scene 8

(The palace of the TROLL-KING. PEER faces the WOMAN IN GREEN, TROLL KING, and TROLLS.)

TROLLS. A human!

A TROLL. He dared to run after the daughter of our king!

TROLLS. Kill him!

—Kill the rat-bastard!

—Can I carve my initials into his face?

—Can I pierce his scrotum sack?

—What color is his blood?

TROLL KING. Keep cool. Ice-cool.

(Pause.)

Can we really afford these hysterics?
The fact is, times have turned against us
His kind, they multiply like rabbits
While we, who built this land
Each year, we slip further into decline
This one, perhaps he can help us

(To PEER:)

Now, young man, turn around

(To TROLLS:)

You see? He's decently-built
At least so far as our eye can tell

(To PEER:)

So, Mudboy — my daughter, you like?

PEER. Your daughter, and your kingdom, too!

TROLLS. Ambitious!

TROLL KING. Suppose I say,
Half while I am alive
And the rest after I pass on

PEER. Sir, you won't regret it—

TROLL KING. Not so fast, Mudboy!
There're a few things
You'll have to do for us first
Fail at even one of them, and—

TROLL COURTIER. And you'll never get out of here alive!
First, you must swear a holy oath
That except for your brothers and sisters
Here within the Order
All others to you are dead

PEER. Once I'm king out here
That won't be so hard.

TROLL KING.
Next, you must ponder our sacred riddle:
What is the difference between trolls and men?

PEER. Frankly — I don't see much difference at all
Big trolls will mow down anything in their path
Little trolls will suck on whatever they find tasty
We'd do the same, if only we had the nerve

TROLL COURTIER. We're as different as day and night

TROLL KING. Tell him what the difference is

TROLL COURTIER. You humans, you overrun our land
With your pathetic little
Slogan: "Be all that you can be"
We trolls, we live by a whole 'nuther creed:
"All that I can be, I already am!"

TROLL KING & TROLLS. All that I can be, I already am!

TROLL COURTIER. You have no idea what we're talking
about, do you?

PEER. Well—

TROLL COURTIER. "I already am!" That's the battle cry!

PEER. OK!

TROLL COURTIER. Or you can never be ruler here

PEER. I get it, I get it
Creeds are just words
One's as good as the next

TROLL KING. Next, you must learn to love — and you will!
Our purifying way of life:
All that we want, we already have!

TROLL COURTIER. From our cows, we get patties
From our cats, warm lemonade

(TROLL COURTIER hands him a bowl of liquid.)

PEER. Forget it!

TROLL COURTIER. Listen, Picky, you can keep the bowl
And that's pure gold

TROLL KING. You have bowl, you get daughter, savvy?

PEER. Then again, good taste or bad
I can live with either one

TROLLS. Bottom's up!

—Cheers!

—Chin-Chin! *(Etc.)*

(He drinks.)

TROLL KING. So quickly, he grasps the matter!

TROLL COURTIER. Did you spit?

TROLLS. He did!

PEER. I always spit. For good luck.

TROLL KING. Next, let's get out of that...native costume of
yours

TROLL COURTIER. It's time you put on a proper tail.

PEER. But I don't want a tail!

TROLLS. No tail?

TROLL COURTIER. You haven't got a choice!

PEER. I won't let you turn me into a beast!

TROLL KING. You can't marry my daughter
With a bare ass

PEER. Why make a fuss about fashion?
Let's get this over with
Stick it in!

(They give him a tail.)

TROLL COURTIER & TROLLS.

Stick it in!
Shake it up!
Move it in!
Twist and shout!
Whip it good!
In and out!
Walk this way!
Watch him, now!
Go, mudboy, go!

*(Song and dance. Suddenly, PEER stops, stares at WOMAN
IN GREEN dancing.)*

PEER. Wait! Stop! This is horrible!

TROLL KING. What's wrong, son?
Speak freely — don't be shy around us

PEER. I saw...a rotting corpse
Thrusting into the backside
Of a pig freshly skinned alive

WOMAN IN GREEN. What a terrible thing to say
About your future bride and her sister!

PEER. That was *you*?

TROLLS. What a terrible thing to say!

TROLL KING. Wait! He still sees the world
Through human eyes

Mudboy, there's one last procedure
Which will complete your initiation
Into the family of the Order

PEER. What now?

TROLL COURTIER. Quite simple. We're going to make an
incision

Across the pupil of your left eye
And then carve out the right one
Socket and all — what d'ya say?

PEER. Are you completely insane?

TROLL KING. Come, he's already got the tools out

One little adjustment
And you'll be liberated
To see your bride as beautiful
And all this, as paradise

PEER. You can't be serious!

TROLL KING. Wait! Think of all the tears

You would never have shed
If you hadn't those eyes
Now, isn't that true?

PEER. Well...there *is* that Bible verse:
"If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out."
But first, tell me, how long
Before my sight returns?

TROLL KING. After he cuts your eyes out?

TROLLS. Never...

PEER. Then — thanks, but no thanks

TROLL KING. Mudboy, what more can we give you?

PEER. You can let me out of here

TROLL COURTIER. You can check in any time you like
But you can never leave

TROLL KING. (*Disappointed:*)

Order — didn't you think he was getting the hang of this?

TROLLS. He was!

TROLL KING. Now, we have been more than reasonable...

PEER. Let me think!

For a queen and her kingdom, too
I'm willing to make some sacrifices
But...within reason...

To think, I can never go back.
To tie myself down in this way?
Pass up future opportunities?
I owe it to myself — I can't!

TROLL KING. Now, you're beginning to irritate me
Don't you know who I am, Mudboy?
And you show me so little respect?
First, you knock up my daughter —

PEER. That's a lie!

TROLL KING. You looked at her with lust in your heart!

PEER. Big deal. When I see most girls,
I feel lust from my head to my toes

TROLL COURTIER. Do you really believe you can live
Without accepting the consequences of your dreams?

WOMAN IN GREEN. By the end of the year, you'll be a father, Prince Peer.

PEER. Listen, you've got the wrong man
I'm not rich, and I'm no prince

TROLLS.

—Not rich?

—Not a prince?

WOMAN IN GREEN. (*Tearfully:*) What a horrible, lying cheat!

(She runs from the room.)

TROLL KING. Order! Rip his heart out of his throat.

(TROLLS attack PEER, chanting:)

TROLLS. Ohren ab! Augen raus!
Ohren ab! Augen raus!

PEER. Mother! They're killing me!
Oh, god! Mother, help me!

(Bells ring, O.S.)

TROLLS. Bells!

(Trolls scatter in a panic.)

Scene 9

(Darkness. PEER lies in the mountains, flailing half-unconscious beneath a large branch.)

PEER. Who are you? Answer me!

MALE VOICE. (*Singing:*) "I did it My Way."

PEER. Just get out of *my* way.

MALE VOICE. Don't be a sucker, Peer. Go with the flow. Take the easy way out.

PEER. Who *are* you?

MALE VOICE. I am...Myself. Don't you wish you could say the same? Well, you can, through this amazing onetime offer.

PEER. For the last time — Who — Are — You?!

MALE VOICE. (*Singing:*) "Learning to Love Yourself/Is the Greatest Love of All"

PEER. That's all I need — stupid answers and lousy singing. OK, *what* are you?

THE INVISIBLE HAND. The Invisible Hand.

PEER. All right. At least I've *heard* of that. Now, get out of my way.

THE INVISIBLE HAND. Take the easy way out. Go the long way around.

PEER. No, I'll go right through your heart!

(He strikes.)

Gotcha, you old windbag!

(Tries to move forward.)

What? You're back?

THE INVISIBLE HAND. Heart? Oh, please. I'm the Invisible Hand. The one, the only! The Invisible Hand rules rich and poor alike. Try as you might, you can't escape The Invisible Hand — in life or in death.

PEER. You've cast a spell on my sword, but I've still got these!

(Hits out with his fists.)

Get out in the open! State your intentions! Identify yourself!

THE INVISIBLE HAND. The Invisible Hand — are you deaf?

PEER. Neither dead nor alive — but everywhere, like a slimy mist — without form or substance.

(Pause.)

I'm unarmed! Come get me!

THE INVISIBLE HAND. What would be the point of that?

PEER. C'mon — hit me!

THE INVISIBLE HAND. But you're a consumer.

PEER. Fight like a man!

THE INVISIBLE HAND. The Invisible Hand triumphs without lifting a finger — get it?

PEER. I need a demon on my back to get my blood going. What the —? Great, now he's snoring. Hey — Hand!

THE INVISIBLE HAND. Sorry.

PEER. Show me what you're made of!

THE INVISIBLE HAND. The Invisible Hand never breaks a sweat.

PEER. Teeth and fangs ripping my flesh. I need the sight of my own blood!

(Peer starts to bite and scratch himself.)

THE INVISIBLE HAND. Don't do that. You'll damage the product. Peer, you were born to greatness, and at last greatness has found thee. Take advantage of the Invisible Hand's special onetime offer. Take the easy way out, and just Be Yourself.

(“My Way” blares over the house speakers. PEER is overcome. He sinks down, beneath the branch, writhing and covering his ears.)

Scene 10

(The forest. PEER awakens near the rock on which he was knocked unconscious.)

PEER. God, I need a strong cup of coffee.

(Sees SOLVEIG, hiding in the bushes.)

PEER. Solveig!

SOLVEIG. Don't come any closer, or I'll leave.

PEER. What are you afraid of? That you'll end up in my arms?

SOLVEIG. Watch your mouth!

PEER. You know who was in my arms last night? The troll princess — tried every trick she could think of to get into my pants.

SOLVEIG. Then it's a good thing we rang the church bells.

PEER. But she wasn't good enough for me. What about you?

(SOLVEIG puts down a basket.)

SOLVEIG. There's food in the basket.

(She exits.)

PEER. No, wait!

(Then, to himself:)

Idiot! I just wanted to make sure she wouldn't forget me. And yet...I wish she'd forget me.

(Pause.)

You're an outlaw now, boy — driven into the wilderness. No Mommy here — no more home-cooked meals. Want a bed? Gather some straw. A home? Chop down some trees. I'll build a beauty with a roof so high...and passing strangers will gaze up and wonder —

(Beat.)

You ass — you're a fugitive!

(Suddenly startled:)

Who's there?

(A cry:)

Solveig!

Scene 11

(ASE's house. Clothes are scattered everywhere. ASE and KARI, a neighbor, attempt to restore some order to the debris.)

ASE. What's that rumbling?

KARI. It's the cart, Mother Ase — hauling off the last load to Haegstad farm.

ASE. Humph. I wish they'd haul *me* away — in a long black box. The suffering never stops. Dear God, they've taken everything in the house! What Ingrid's father left behind, the lawyers took in lieu of fees.

(Sits on bed.)

The farm and the land are lost forever. No one came to my defense, or showed a drop of mercy. If only Peer had been here — *he'd* have done something.

KARI. They were kind enough to leave you your house.

ASE. Yes — the cat and I can come home every night after begging.

KARI. Your Peer has really brought you down with him this time.

ASE. Peer? Ingrid got home safe and sound, didn't she? They should've put the real criminal on trial — Satan! Pulled a cart up to his house — *there'd* be some booty. Instead, the devil goes free and pins the blame on my son!

KARI. Maybe I should send for the parson. You don't sound so well.

ASE. Yes, maybe I *could* use a little rest.

(Pause.)

Wait, what am I —? I can't stop now, I'm his mother, I've got to help him somehow. They left him this jacket. I'll patch it up. If only I'd thought to hide the fur rug. And what happened to his stockings?

KARI. They're in the trash.

ASE. Fetch those, and — what have we here? Two flannel shirts — the vultures must've passed them over!

KARI. It seems as if they did.

ASE. Our luck may be looking up already. Who would be the wiser if we kept just one? Or both of them?

KARI. But, Mother Ase — that would be stealing. Now don't *you* start falling into sin.

ASE. That's why God made priests, my dear. So all our sins might be forgiven.

Scene 12

(A forest clearing. In the middle, a small hut marks the beginning of a home PEER has started to construct for himself. He stands a distance away, chopping down a tree.)

PEER. You think you're tough? Not tough enough, Sir Lancelot — you're coming down!

(Pause; to himself:)

You're pathetic, Peer. It's just a tree — a tree! For once, will you stop dreaming?

(SOLVEIG enters on skis, carrying a bundle of possessions.)

SOLVEIG. Don't tell me to go.

PEER. Solveig! This is impossible. You're here? You're not afraid of me?

SOLVEIG. Nights without joy, days without light — they kept your face before me. I could see nothing else — only barren resignation with neither laughter nor tears. I didn't know if you were serious, but I had to find out for myself.

PEER. But what about your father?

SOLVEIG. In this world, there's no one left whom I call mother or father. I've left them behind, forever.

PEER. Solveig, my sweetest — you did this...for me?

SOLVEIG. To come to you, yes. You're all I have in the world now.

PEER. You heard about the verdict last spring. They stripped me of my farm and my lineage. There's a price on my head. If I step outside the forest, I'm fair game for anyone.

SOLVEIG. Coming up here, I stopped to ask the way. They said, "Why are you going there?" I said, "It's my home."

PEER. Oh, Solveig! Stand still, I want to look at you. You are such an angel. I could carry you through eternity and never feel burdened. I swear, I'll make myself worthy of your trust

— I won't soil you with the dark things I've done. That you come for me — you have lived what I only dared dream.

SOLVEIG. I had to come up.

PEER. This is for life?

SOLVEIG. This journey I have begun, I will never abandon.

PEER. Then you are mine! Go inside — you must be tired. You shall rest without fear, and you shall never be cold. You'll see. I'll build us a beauty. With a roof so high — at its summit, a weathervane, and for the end of the gable, I'll carve a mermaid. The vane and the fixtures will be polished brass ...

(Pause.)

There I go again. Truth is, we'll be lucky to end up in a mud hut, covered with bark.

SOLVEIG. Your dreams — they seem more real than most people's lives. You must dream for us both, now.

PEER. Solveig. I'll gather some wood, to start a fire.

(Opens the door, and SOLVEIG goes in. PEER leaps into the air with happiness. Picks up his ax and starts to go. As an OLD HAG in a torn green dress enters, along with an UGLY BOY holding a nursing bottle.)

OLD HAG. Good morning, Mr. Happy Go Lucky.

PEER. Who are you?

OLD HAG. An old friend, Peer Gynt. I live quite near — in fact, we're neighbors.

PEER. Really? I never noticed.

OLD HAG. As you built your hut, I built mine.

PEER. I'm in a hurry.

OLD HAG. You always were, young man.

PEER. What the hell are you —?

OLD HAG. You forgot the banquet in my father's hall? You forgot —

PEER. How can I forget what never happened? When did we meet last?

OLD HAG. The last time we met — was also the first time.

(To UGLY BOY:)

Give your Daddy a drink — he can't resist a good suck.

PEER. "Daddy?"

OLD HAG. The apple doesn't fall too far from the tree. Can't you see his body is as twisted as your soul?

PEER. You really expect me to believe —?

OLD HAG. Grew up quickly, didn't he?

PEER. —that this freak of nature ...

OLD HAG. You won't worm away this time!

PEER. You pig-faced hag, how dare you make up —!

OLD HAG. Is it my fault I'm not the beauty you ruined up on the hillside? When fall came around, in the agonies of my labor, only Satan stayed behind to hear my cries. Is it any wonder I came away old and ugly? But if you want to see me young and lovely again, just show that bitch the door. Do that, my dearest, and see how fast this snout disappears.

PEER. Get away from me, you troll witch!

OLD HAG. Oh, no — I've got plans for you!

PEER. I'll break your skull open!

OLD HAG. C'mon — try it — I dare you! How can you hurt me now, when I breathe pain as others do air? No, I will keep coming around 'til the day you die. My eyes at your door. Yes, when you sit by the fire with your little tramp, when you touch her, when your lips find her bosom — then, I'll appear — sliding in between you — and we'll be having you — both. So go ahead, marry her — it'll be 'til death do us part!

PEER. You're a nightmare from hell!

OLD HAG. And one more thing. Once you're happily married, Mr. Happy Feet, you can also raise your son.

(To UGLY BOY:)

C'mon, little Peer — give your Daddy a kiss.

UGLY BOY. *(To PEER:)* I'll bash your brains out!

(OLD HAG kisses UGLY BOY.)

OLD HAG. See? He's the spitting image — aren't you, Junior?

(The BOY throws his bottle at PEER, as he and the OLD HAG exit.)

PEER. "Take the easy way out," said the Invisible Hand. "Go the long way around." Solveig — how can I face her now? With the words of the Troll-Witch hanging over my head?

(Pause.)

But, wait — I shouldn't let that old hag get to me, I've changed. All my wickedness — it's in the past.

(Pause.)

But the past grows up to become the present, and looks out upon the future. I'm not ready, yet — the stench of my sins would foul the air. "Take the easy way out," boy. Even if my arms were as long as tree branches, I couldn't hold her far enough to protect her from me.

(Throws down his ax.)

Tomorrow is Easter — the day of resurrection. To take her like this — my soul rotting — would be sacrilege.

(SOLVEIG appears in the doorway.)

SOLVEIG. Are you coming?

PEER. I'm looking for an easier way.

SOLVEIG. Excuse me?

PEER. Please wait. It's dark out now, and before I can come in, I must find something.

SOLVEIG. May I help you?

PEER. No, it's heavy. And I must carry this load alone.

SOLVEIG. Well — don't stay out too long.

PEER. Be patient, my angel. Long or short — I hope you will wait.

SOLVEIG. Yes, I will. I will wait.

(PEER goes down the forest path, SOLVEIG remains standing at the open door.)

Scene 13

(ASE's home. Evening. She lies in bed. PEER enters.)

PEER. Hello, mother.

ASE. God bless you, my son. You've come at last. But what's gotten into you? Have you forgotten there's a price on your head?

PEER. My head's not worth much. I just had to see you.

ASE. Now I can go peacefully.

PEER. Go? Where?

ASE. Oh, Peer, there's no use pretending any longer — I haven't much time left.

PEER. *(Aside:)* I run from one tragedy straight into another. I thought for certain that *she* could tell me what to do.

(To ASE:)

Your hands and feet — are they cold?

ASE. They were, but that's long past now. When my eyes cloud over, close them, one by one. And then build me a

coffin. Make sure you use the finest materials — oh God, I forgot ...

PEER. Sssh! Don't think about that.

ASE. Look at the few scraps they left me. That's their idea of justice.

PEER. Don't start. I know it was all my fault. But that's the last thing I need to hear from you now!

ASE. No, no — it was the liquor, *that's* what's cursed us every step of the way. You're not responsible for your actions, you were drunk! And weak from that reindeer ride, too!

PEER. Let's not talk about it any more. So — what's been happening in town?

ASE. Everyone's whispering about a certain girl. They say she's yearning to go up into the mountains.

PEER. What about Mads Moen — did he ever get over things?

ASE. And, what's more, they say she's deaf to the pleas of her father and mother. Peer, why don't you go over and see her. I bet you could solve the problem.

PEER. And Aslak — anything new with him?

ASE. Don't even mention that bully. Now, listen — wouldn't you like to know the name of the girl I've been talking about?

PEER. You must be thirsty. Let me get you some water. And you're all cramped in that bed! What the —? It's the bed I used as a boy! Remember how every night, you'd sit here and tuck me in? Then tell me stories and sing songs?

ASE. Of course I do. After your father left us, we'd play sleigh-ride. Your blanket was a cover of fur, and the floor an icy fjord.

PEER. And the best part — do you remember our beautiful team of prize stallions?

ASE. Seems like no time has passed at all. I was the driver then.

PEER. Yes, yes. And you drove them fast. Turning around, as the wind whipped up, to make sure I was warm. God bless you, you sweet old thing, you always treated me with so much love. Are you moaning?

ASE. It's — my back. These boards are no comfort at all.

PEER. Then lean on me instead. How's that? Feel better?

ASE. Peer, I want to keep moving.

PEER. Keep moving?

ASE. To my final destination.

PEER. Here — let me fix the blanket — and take the reins.

ASE. I can't stop thinking of all that's gone wrong.

PEER. You know, right now, in Sonia Moria Castle, they're holding a feast for the king. Lie back on this silken cushion, and I'll drive you there over the snow.

ASE. But Peer — am I invited?

PEER. Of course, we both are.

(He throws a cord round the chair where the cat sits, then takes a stick in hand.)

PEER. Geddiyup! Come on, Dasher, Blitzen, and all the rest of you. Mother, tell me if you're getting cold. Hey, Rudolph's lighting the way — nothing can stop us now!

ASE. Peer — my ears — something's ringing!

PEER. Those are the silver sleighbells.

ASE. But they sound so hollow.

PEER. On account of us flying over the fjords!

ASE. Peer, I'm scared. Now, something's roaring — fiercely, as if to gobble me up!

PEER. Those are trees, battered by the storm beneath us. But we're safe up here.

ASE. In the distance, I see a light — getting brighter, coming towards me.

PEER. The lights of the castle. Can't you hear the dancing inside?

ASE. Yes — I think I can...

PEER. And look, it's St. Peter at the gate. With the welcome wagon.

ASE. For me?

PEER. Yes, it's a great honor. He's pouring their sweetest wine.

ASE. Wine? Will there be cakes, too?

PEER. Stacks and stacks! On platters of gold! And there's the bishop's wife — with coffee and fruits.

ASE. But I feel so tired. From the hardships of my journey.

PEER. It won't be long now. Just a bit longer. You've almost gained the castle.

ASE. Then I'll just close my eyes, lie back, and leave the rest to you, my son.

PEER. Pick up the pace, Rudolph, lead on! The castle is filled with the righteous, all crowding the gates and lifting their glasses. "Peer Gynt and his mother have arrived at last!" What's this? St. Peter — you can't open the gates without checking your book? I think it's pretty damn obvious — excuse me — that there's not a finer woman to be found. Now, if it's *me* you're worried about, say no more. I mean, if you'd like me to stay for drinks, I'm touched, but I'd be pretty shocked. After all, when it comes to lies, I know I used up my lifetime allowance many years ago. That my poor mother saw fit to put up with me — is the best proof of her godliness. So you will show her respect and honor, and make her feel at home. You'll find the world doesn't make them any better nowadays. Uh-oh, here comes God the Father. St. Peter, now you are going to catch hell.

(In a deep voice:)

“Don’t act like a big shot. Let Mother Ase in this instant!”

(Turns to ASE:)

There, see, just like I promised you. He’s singing from a different hymnal now!

(Then:)

Why are you staring like that?

(Feels her hand and forehead.)

Stop looking at me that way! It’s Peer, your son — speak to me!

(Tosses away the cord.)

It’s done. Rudolph, that’s the end of the road.

(Closes her eyes.)

Thank you for all of your days. For the spankings and kisses. And now, could the driver take his tip?

(Kisses her.)

Thanks for the ride.

(KARI enters.)

KARI. Peer Gynt, you’ve finally come ’round. So her prayers are answered.

PEER. Sssh. She is dead.

(KARI pauses, crosses herself.)

KARI. At last her suffering has come to an end.

(PEER hands her some coins.)

PEER. Make sure she gets a decent burial. I’m getting out of here.

KARI. Run away. Just like your father. You’ll come to no better end, I’m certain.

PEER. My life will not be like his.

KARI. Are you sure? Take the road north of Blaho. Where the spirits live, who can show a traveler his future.

PEER. You think I'm afraid to know?

KARI. You should be. You'll never amount to anything.

PEER. I'll go far. Far as my dreams can take me.

(PEER exits. We see an image of SOLVEIG, standing by the hut where Peer left her. She picks up the ax, splits a pile of logs.)

End of Act I

ACT II

Scene 1

(A ship in the North Sea off Norway. OLD PEER, 60, a weather-beaten man, stands beside the ship's CAPTAIN.)

CAPTAIN. Two men on the wheel! Hoist the lantern!

OLD PEER. Wind's picking up.

CAPTAIN. Aye. There'll be a storm tonight.

OLD PEER. Can we see the peaks of the Ronde from here?

CAPTAIN. Not likely. They're hidden behind the glacier.

OLD PEER. What about Blaho?

CAPTAIN. Over in that direction.

OLD PEER. I see.

CAPTAIN. You're not a stranger to the region.

OLD PEER. When I left home, we sailed in this direction. And you know what they say — a bad penny always comes back. Don't let me forget — when we settle up, I'd like to leave a little extra for the crew.

CAPTAIN. That'd be much appreciated, sir.

OLD PEER. Don't expect much. I've gathered gold, only to watch it slip through my fingers. Lady Luck's a painted whore who stood me up at the altar.

Scene 2

(Flashback. A grove on the southwestern coast of Morocco. A MIDDLE-AGED PEER, 40, hosts a dinner for MR. COTTON, MONSIEUR BALLON, and HERR TRUMPETERSTRALE.)

PEER. Bottom's up, gentlemen. Man was made for pleasure, and now at last pleasure has found thee. As they say, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." Now — who needs a refill?

TRUMPETERSTRALE. Gynt, my man. You are the host with the most.

BALLON. Yes, you live life like a man half your age.

PEER. Want to know my secret? It's because I've put out of my mind all thoughts of marriage. A man is already all he can be — why attach himself to another?

COTTON. This originally of thought ranks with the great thinkers of man. And yet you never studied philosophy?

PEER. Never studied nothing. I'm as self-made as can be. When I headed out West, I was a country bumpkin with empty pockets, without even bootstraps to pull up. I had to fight for every meal. But life is a party and only death turns out the lights. Lady Luck took a shine to me, and I began to climb the ladder. In just ten years, they called me King of the Charleston Traders. My ships overflowed with profits, and—

COTTON. What did you trade in?

PEER. Mostly, Negro slaves bound for Charleston and opium for the Chinese market.

BALLON. *Fi donc!*

TRUMPETERSTRALE. You couldn't have!

PEER. I know. You feel that sort of business lacks a certain moral prestige. Well, I agree with you 100% — and came to find the whole enterprise sickening. But, you know, once you get started. Not to mention the thousands of workers I

would've had to lay off — no, I didn't have the heart to just shut down. Never burn your bridges behind you — that's something I learned in my hometown.

BALLON. You are Norwegian?

PEER. By birth, yes. But, in my heart, I am a citizen of the world. For my material wealth, I have to thank America. My well-stocked library is filled with German thinkers. I acquired my wit from France, my business sense from England, and my patience from the Jews. Italy gave me a taste for la dolce vita. And once, I managed to save my skin with the help of Swedish steel.

TRUMPETERSTRALE. Ja! Swedish steel!

BALLON. Beautiful! We raise a toast to the man who lives by the sword!

COTTON. This is all most interesting. But what I'm curious about, is what you're planning to do with your fortune.

PEER. Want to know a secret?

(They clamor affirmatively.)

PEER. First, I thought I'd take a little trip. That's why I invited all of you along in Gibraltar. Nothing makes me happier than an entire entourage to kiss my golden calf.

TRUMPETERSTRALE. Ha, ha! That's a good one!

COTTON. Yes, but no one like you sets out on a trip merely for pleasure. I'd bet this is part of some grander scheme. What is it?

PEER. I plan to be Emperor.

ALL. What?

PEER. Emperor!

(All improvise: "Emperor of what?")

PEER. Of the world entire.

BALLON. Just how do you plan to do that?

PEER. By the power of money — and of Gyntianism.

COTTON. Gyntianism? What is this?

PEER. It is the belief that each man must be liberated to realize his full potential. Gyntianism — by pursuing our own desires, we discharge our duties to our fellow man. In short, my only responsibility on this earth is to Myself. And, as God required clay to fashion the world in His own image, so I require gold to remake it in mine.

BALLON. But you have gold.

PEER. Not nearly enough. Maybe enough to last a few days as emperor of some puny state like Rhode Island. But I must clear all obstacles which inhibit self-realization. I must have power across the globe — to sign my own contract with the world!

COTTON. But first, you must find a way to make that money, eh?

(A SERVANT enters, whispers in PEER's ear, then exits.)

PEER. Gentlemen, it seems I have a means to the profits I require. I've just been given some important news. Which proves that God helps those who help themselves.

ALL. What is it?

PEER. The Greek revolt has begun!

(Murmurs of astonishment.)

PEER. Yes, they are fighting the Turks for their independence!

(Cheers.)

PEER. And things do not look good for Turkey.

COTTON. On to Greece! We will do the right thing and supply them with weapons.

BALLON. Yes — to join the Christian rebels with money and guns!

PEER. Are you insane? You want me to give money to the disadvantaged? No, I'll lend my fortune to the Islamic Army.

BALLON. Impossible!

TRUMPETERSTRALE. What a card! You're joking, right?

PEER. *You go to Greece.* I'll take you myself and give you some ammo to get started. The more rabble you rouse, the more I'll squeeze out of the Turks. Fight for the underdog — and end up on the tip of a spear. As for me — I'm too rich for such childishness — and I must be true to Myself — Emperor Gynt!

(He exits.)

COTTON. What an ass!

TRUMPETERSTRALE. Dumbkoff!

BALLON. Merde-head!

TRUMPETERSTRALE. He hasn't a shred of morality.

BALLON. Out there is his morality — a safe with all the money he's made off the sweat of his slaves.

COTTON. Wait. I've got it. His Empire — it's sitting right before us. Why not?

BALLON. You cannot be suggesting —

COTTON. We'll take it over! All we have to do is bribe the crew, and it'll be ours. To the ship!

TRUMPETERSTRALE. Ja? Really?

COTTON. Without a second thought. Just do it!

(He exits.)

TRUMPETERSTRALE. A common thief!

BALLON. This is a dirty business. But I can't change the world.

(He follows.)

TRUMPETERSTRALE. All right — you've twisted my arm! But this was not my idea. I am not a crook!

(He follows.)

Scene 3

(An hour after the end of Scene Two. PEER remains onshore, watching his yacht steam out to sea.)

PEER. This is a nightmare! A hallucination! Heading out to sea? It's a mirage, that's it! I refuse to accept a death like this. I demand this all be a dream.

(Pause.)

Jesus Christ, I think it's true. Those ingrates. Immoralists! Hello? Dear Lord? You know I've always believed in my heart that you are wise and fair. So smite them!

(Raising his arms.)

It's me — your old buddy. Peer Gynt! Don't be a fair-weather friend. Punish the guilty. Clearly, I'm the one who's righteous, here. Fuck, the old coot's deaf and probably senile to boot.

(Pause.)

OK, I'll make you a deal. My profits from the slaving business — I'll use it all to found a great university! Yes — that's the ticket — now, do your part. Get me back on board that ship!

(The yacht explodes. When the smoke clears, the boat has vanished.)

PEER. No shit! How about that? The, the righteous wrath of Yahweh. My ship's gone down — with every miserable sinner on board. Goddamn it, has any bastard ever been luckier than me?

Scene 4

(Back on board the ship in Act II, Scene 1. OLD PEER continues speaking with the CAPTAIN.)

OLD PEER. Luck? I don't believe in that any longer. You know how much I've got with me. That's it. The rest I pissed away someplace or another.

CAPTAIN. That's more than enough to make you a big shot with the folks at home.

OLD PEER. What home? No one's waiting for this rich old Scrooge. Well, at least, I won't have to endure any touching reunions on the dock.

CAPTAIN. Storm's about to hit.

OLD PEER. So it is. Anyway, don't forget, if any of your men are really hurting, this money's not doing any good in my pocket.

CAPTAIN. That's real kind. They're all struggling to survive, especially with wives and children back home. Their pay ain't enough to make ends meet, so if they manage to scrape up a little extra, they'll come home to a hero's welcome.

OLD PEER. What? Captain, you said, wives and children? As in, they're married?

CAPTAIN. Every last one. The Cook's the worst off of them all. His children are never far from starvation.

OLD PEER. Married, huh? Someone's waiting at home with open arms, that whole bit?

CAPTAIN. Yes, it's one of the few luxuries poor folk can afford.

OLD PEER. When they get home, what'll that be like?

CAPTAIN. I'd reckon their wives will try to scrape together a special meal.

OLD PEER. They'll light a candle?

CAPTAIN. Maybe more than one. And find a little something for Dad to drink.

OLD PEER. Yes, I can see it now — all cozy, fire blazing — children milling about, everyone talking at once, no one able to finish a sentence, for all the chatter and laughter.

CAPTAIN. That's about the size of it. And they'll probably take a moment to thank you — for the gift you're about to give.

OLD PEER. Gift? To hell with that! Who do I look like — Santa Claus? You expect me to throw away my money because other men made more kids than they can support? I've worked like a dog for every last penny. And you don't see anyone waiting with a candle for me!

CAPTAIN. Well, suit yourself. It's your money.

OLD PEER. That's the first sensible thing you've said all night. It's mine, and no one else's.

(CAPTAIN exits. Ship lurches.)

OLD PEER. The sea's kicking up as if it were working for the devil.

(To no one in particular:)

Fools! You think your women are waiting in the window for you with a candle? Maybe one shoved between their legs!

(To himself:)

I know women — they lure a man with their siren songs — just long enough to plunge the knife into his back.

Scene 5

(Flashback. Peer reclines in a desert tent. ANITRA and a bevy of SLAVE GIRLS dance and sing for him.)

ANITRA & SLAVEGIRLS.

The Prophet is come!

The Prophet, the Lord of Change, the Most Pale One

The Prophet, the Prophet is come!

PEER. I'd heard the saying, but I never understood it 'til now: No man's a prophet in his own land. Well, this set-up's a thousand times better than trading slaves. Something about that whole business wasn't quite on the up-and-up, it didn't

promote self-esteem. I never even considered myself one of them. To find myself based on wealth? It's like the little pig who built his house on sand. True, people will blow smoke up your ass if you flash a fancy watch or pinkie ring. But a prophet — there's a job with a future! He is true to himself, without reservation! A prophet — *this* is the life for me. But, you know, I just sort of fell into it. I was riding across the desert, when I bumped into these desperate creatures. They called me their Prophet, and wouldn't take no for an answer. I couldn't disappoint them.

ANITRA. My lord and master.

PEER. Yes, slave girl? You wish to speak?

ANITRA. The children of the desert approacheth thy tent, seeking only to toucheth the hem of thy cloak-eth.

PEER. Tell them, keepeth their distance, and I'll consider granting-eth, granting their desire. But stay back, until I've had a chance to look them over. Oh — and in no case is any man to sully this doorstep, understand? Men, my dear, have only one thing on their minds. But enough of that. Now, dance for me, you Schiharizades! I am so jaded and world-weary, can you give me something to live for?

ANITRA & SLAVEGIRLS.

All hail the Prophet
Our Prophet shows the way
From him, we profit
Night and day
He speaks, eternally
With sense, so common
Like Allah or Moses
But most like Tutankhamen

PEER. Doesn't she just make your mouth water? Anitra — approach me!

ANITRA. Thy slave yearns for enlightenment.

PEER. Little girl, you're irresistible. I mean, you uplift your Prophet. You will be my queen in Paradise.

ANITRA. Impossible, master.

PEER. What do you mean, “impossible?” I’m the Prophet!

ANITRA. But I don’t have a soul.

PEER. Don’t worry, I’ll get you one.

ANITRA. But I’ve done so many wicked things.

PEER. I’ll bet you have. That’s why you need me to, to instruct you in rites of purification. No soul? You’re maybe a bubble-head, that’s all. A quality which, though sometimes irritating, does have its uses. By the time I’m done with you, sweetheart, you will be Queen of Soul.

ANITRA. The Prophet is kind, but —

PEER. Don’t be shy.

ANITRA. A soul is so boring. I’d much rather have —

PEER. What? C’mon!

ANITRA. That fiery opal.

PEER. Anitra! It seems that Eve must have her apple. And I, being a man, cannot resist. Woman is man’s better half — I mean of course the half from the waist down!

(Ladies laugh.)

ANITRA. So tell me, Master, how will thy child gainst her soul? Will you whisper the secret into my ear?

PEER. You’ll have plenty of time to gain a soul, don’t worry. But, on such an enchanted evening, even if I wanted to, I’d be a fool to waste my time using words alone to open you up. Would you like to experience true Paradise?

ANITRA. Yes, yes! Teach me!

(He gropes her.)

ANITRA. Stop that! Or I’ll bite you!

PEER. That’s not a bad idea.

ANITRA. What exactly do you want from me?

PEER. I want — I want to play escaped prisoner and the warden's wife. I want to kidnap you. Do crazy things with rubber.

ANITRA. You should be ashamed, Prophet! At your age?

PEER. You silly goose, your Prophet's a lot younger than he looks. Now, have I given you some new ideas?

ANITRA. Yes — I'd like to play with your ring.

PEER. Anitra, baby — take them all — here!

ANITRA. Yes, you *are* young. Haveth thou any more?

PEER. Yes, oh yes, I *am* young. Here — trinkets and beads. I've never felt so young in my entire life. Look, look — I feel good!

(He starts to sing and dance.)

PEER. *(To the tune of "Yankee Doodle Dandy":)*

I'm the Hardest-Working Prophet
Wipe my brow and dab my chin
Watch me go from dusk to sunrise
Catch my breath and start again

ANITRA. Prophet, you're all sweaty. I think you're going to melt. Hanging from your belt — that big, heavy pouch — let me hold it.

PEER. That's so thoughtful. Yes, carry my burdens! Now, hurt me — so I'll never forget. In a state such as mine, who can distinguish pleasure from pain?

ANITRA. Thy wish is Anitra's command!

(She raps him on the knuckles.)

Ta-ta!

(She rides off across the desert.)

PEER. Well, stupid is as stupid does...

Scene 6

(Back on board the boat, OLD PEER watches the tempest rising.)

OLD PEER. What on earth was I thinking? Trying to dance away the years. Reclining on a pasha's pillows, fancying myself a warbling lovebird — only to end up the Thanksgiving turkey, with all my feathers plucked. That's what I call religious fanaticism.

(Hears something.)

What was that?

(CREW MEMBERS enter.)

THE WATCH. Wreck to windward!

(CAPTAIN enters, giving orders.)

CAPTAIN. Starboard the helm! Keep her close to the wind.

HELMSMAN. Are there men on that wreck?

THE WATCH. I spot three!

OLD PEER. Quick! Lower a boat!

CAPTAIN. It'd be swamped with water before we could get to them.

OLD PEER. So you're not even going to try? If you were man enough, you'd save them! Are you all afraid of a little water?

BO'SUN. With the sea like this, it's impossible.

OLD PEER. But they're screaming! And — look — here's a lull in the storm. You, Cook! Will you try? I'll pay you for it — how's that?

COOK. Sorry. Not if you gave me twenty pounds.

OLD PEER. You animals! Cowards! Can't you see these are human beings? With wives and children. Probably sitting at home, waiting —

BO'SUN. Well, patience is a virtue.

CAPTAIN. Steer clear of those rocks!

HELMSMAN. The wreck's going under — there she goes.

OLD PEER. Suddenly, everything is so ... quiet.

BO'SUN. If they really *were* married, the world just got itself three brand-new widows.

(CREW MEMBERS *exit.*)

OLD PEER. Well, they can't blame me. If there's ever an investigation, I can testify — under oath! — that I stood here, begging them to take my money. But who cares, anyway? The world today has lost its moral compass. The search for truth, the pursuit of knowledge — in a world with neither to be found, it's a quest fit only for madmen.

Scene 7

(Flashback. PEER stands before the Sphinx.)

PEER. It looks so familiar
Yes, I have definitely
Seen this ugly thing before
But where ... where ...
Of course!
This is the Invisible Hand
Who fled before my attack
Like a little girly-man

(To Sphinx:)

Hey, Hand — ready to answer me now?
Hand — who the hell are you?

A VOICE. (*Off-stage:*) Hey, Sphinx, who are you? [*Except, in French.*]

PEER. What the —? A *French* echo? That's really weird.

A VOICE. (*Off-stage:*) Who are you?

PEER. An amazing discovery!

This will make my name at last

(He writes in his book:)

“French echo — accent ... Parisienne.”

(A pair of BEGRIFFENFELDTS enter from behind the statue.)

BEGRIFFENFELDTS. A human!

PEER. Hmmm — not so amazing, after all

(Writes in his book:)

“On examination, rejected initial hypothesis”

BEGRIFFENFELDTS. Pardon, *Monsieur*

But I think you must consider

What social forces brought you

To this place today?

PEER. Let's just say, I came to see an old friend

BEGRIFFENFELDTS. The Sphinx ... is your friend?

PEER. We went a few rounds

BEGRIFFENFELDTS. You *knew* the Sphinx? Even *struggled* with him?

Perhaps then, you can tell us

What does he believe himself to be?

PEER. He is, quite simply, himself

BEGRIFFENFELDTS. Then the Sphinx also

Is prone to self-delusion

As, of course, are we all

(To PEER:)

Perhaps you should tell us your name

PEER. I came into this world as Peer Gynt

BEGRIFFENFELDTS.

Peer Gynt. He takes a name from literature

Peer Gynt. Making his very identity a fiction

I knew it! That some day, a case like this

Would come across our path

PEER. You were expecting me?

BEGRIFFENFELDTS. Of course! Peer Gynt!
A Norwegian tale, wasn't it?
Which all the world finds incomprehensible.
So, "Peer Gynt" — what are you?

PEER. I do my best
To be myself

BEGRIFFENFELDTS. He's addicted to that word,
"Myself"
I knew one day, a case this severe
Would come across our path

(To PEER:)

You must come with us to Cairo
Where you shall reign as King of Yourself

PEER. Did you say "King?"

BEGRIFFENFELDTS. Yes! Now, come!

(BEGRIFFENFELDT 1 takes PEER aside.)

BEGRIFFENFELDT 1. Monsieur Peer, there is one more thing
you should know

PEER. What's the matter?

BEGRIFFENFELDT 1. You must not, under any circumstances
Scream or grow hysterical

PEER. I'll try not to ...

BEGRIFFENFELDT 1. All right. Last night, at 11 p.m.
I realized I had lost my context

PEER. Your context?

BEGRIFFENFELDT 1. Without a context,
I can have no identity,
You see, until last night,
I believed I was running a madhouse

PEER. You mean *this* is ...?

BEGRIFFENFELDT 1. But now, of course
I can't run it any longer

PEER. (*To BEGRIFFENFELDTS:*)
Sir, this has been most enlightening
But I'm afraid I have a previous engagement

BEGRIFFENFELDTS. Don't be frightened!
The word "madhouse"
Is simply a social construct

(Opens a door and calls:)

Members of the Academy!
We have found him.
A man uniquely suited
To reconstruct us all.
Long live Peer Gynt!

PEER. Wait — I really don't think ...

(ACADEMICS emerge from the Sphinx.)

BEGRIFFENFELDTS. Good morning, professors
Publish or perish!
Meet the new boss
Same as the old boss

PEER. "Boss?"

BEGRIFFENFELDTS. Yes, Department Chair. Dean. Om-
budsman!

PEER. Well, I'll do my best ...

BEGRIFFENFELDTS. We're a school without walls, here.

*(THE FELLAH — an Egyptian peasant — carries a dead cat
on his back.)*

BEGRIFFENFELDTS. (*To THE FELLAH:*) Well, if it isn't King
Apis, Doctor of Semantics!

THE FELLAH. *Am I King Apis?*

PEER. At first glance, I would say —

THE FELLAH. No, no! Not so quickly!
You can't classify me
Without first studying
The history of my oppression

BEGRIFFENFELDTS. Perhaps your Highness
Could summarize your thesis

THE FELLAH. This creature I carry
Upon my back
Represents King Apis
Who sculpted the Sphinx
And built the Great Pyramids
Before he died,
He took a shit one day
On my ancestor's land
And the soil he fertilized
Grew food on which I fed
So, you see, I am King Apis
Tell me, Monsieur Doctor,
How can I legitimize my identity
In the eyes of the mainstream?

PEER. Why don't you build
Pyramids, too? And a Sphinx.

THE FELLAH. Well, isn't that the most reactionary ...
I'm an adjunct! I can barely feed myself!
If that's the best you can do,
You're no better than the rest

PEER. Well, then go hang yourself!

THE FELLAH. Hang myself? How brilliant!
In this way, I shall finally come
To resemble my dead ancestor!

(He prepares to hang himself.)

BEGRIFFENFELDTS. A brilliant man
Such a pity he can't spell

PEER. He's not really ...
Going to hang himself, is he?

(HUSSEIN enters.)

HUSSEIN. Hello, hello, I understand
There's a new Doctor here

(To PEER:)

Is it you?

PEER. They say I am

HUSSEIN. Thank god. You see my problem is,
I'm a pen
Without a piece of paper
Upon which to complete my dissertation

PEER. *(Seeing THE FELLAH:)*
Oh my god!
Look what he's doing!

BEGRIFFENFELDTS. He's just deconstructing himself

(THE FELLAH hangs himself.)

HUSSEIN. *(To PEER:)*
Please will you help me?
This is so frustrating!

PEER. The world — is spinning ...

HUSSEIN. *(To PEER:)*
I am a pen!
I am a pen!
Where can I write?
Where can I write?

PEER. *(To HUSSEIN:)*
Write on me!

HUSSEIN. Oh, thank you, thank you!

(He pulls out a knife, slits his own throat.)

BEGRIFFENFELDTS. Hey! Don't splash on my suit!

(HUSSEIN chases PEER around the room, trying to bleed on him.)

PEER. (To HUSSEIN:.) Get away from me!

HUSSEIN. Please, Doctor, please!
Twenty-five years ago
I completed the necessary credits.

(He falls to the ground.)

I died as I lived
A pen in the hands of others

(HUSSEIN dies.)

PEER. What should I —?
Who am I —?
I'll be whatever you want
Prophet, troll, madman
Just tell me!
Before I lose myself forever!
Dear God in heaven
I can't remember ...
Your name, your words
But help me!
Have pity on a poor madman!

(He collapses, incoherent.)

BEGRIFFENFELDTS. Now, whip us, boil us,
Hang us up by our hair!
Rule us hard, rule us good!
Long live ... the King of Himself!

MADMEN. *Es lebe hoch der grosse Peer!* [Except, in French.]

Scene 8

(Back on board the boat, OLD PEER paces along the deck in the storm.)

OLD PEER. I know what my problem is — I've been too soft on others! If I were starting again, I'd do it all differently. No

more Mr. Nice Guy! Hell, there's still time. Start spreading the news — Peer Gynt's come home at last! I'll get back the farm, by any means necessary. And rebuild it into a palace. But I won't let anyone come inside. No, they can sleep by the doors and bang on the windows — they can plead and grovel — and you know they will — but they won't get a penny from me. If Fortune's spit in my eye, I'll prove my aim can be every bit as precise.

(CANCER enters. He chain-smokes cigarettes and wears a surgeon's gown, from which hang a variety of scalpels and other nasty-looking tools of medicine.)

CANCER. Cigarette, friend?

OLD PEER. My god — who are you?

CANCER. Your fellow passenger.

OLD PEER. I thought there weren't any others.

CANCER. Well, what do I look like to you?

OLD PEER. Like some god-awful apparition from out of the storm.

CANCER. Yes, such an inspiring sight.

OLD PEER. "Inspiring?"

CANCER. Oh, yes. The waves as high as houses. When I imagine all the wrecked ships, the corpses washing ashore — reminds me not to get lazy in my own line of work.

OLD PEER. And what might that be?

CANCER. Cancer of the spine, for instance — there's one of my favorites.

OLD PEER. I see — you're a full-time lunatic.

CANCER. Such a beautiful death. In their final agonies, many of the chosen bite off their own tongues.

OLD PEER. Get away from me!

CANCER. Just one question. Let's say you were to — I don't know — somehow survive this trip.

OLD PEER. Do you think it's possible?

CANCER. I like to prepare for any outcome. Sometimes, when a man's caught in a terrible storm, he suddenly becomes generous.

OLD PEER. *(Reaching in his pocket:)* Oh, I get it. It's money you're —

CANCER. Not quite. But would you consider making me a gift of your bones and a few vital organs?

OLD PEER. Now, this is going too far!

CANCER. I only need one to get started. The rest will take care of itself.

OLD PEER. Go to hell!

CANCER. You won't even know I'm there — for years, maybe a decade!

OLD PEER. You're asking for trouble! Talk like that tempts the fates!

CANCER. If not now, then maybe when you're clinging to the wreckage — hopefully you'll be in a better mood.

(CANCER exits, as the BO'SUN enters.)

OLD PEER. *(To BO'SUN:)* Sir, that passenger over there. Who let him out of his straightjacket?

BO'SUN. You're the only passenger on board, sir.

OLD PEER. There's no one else?

BO'SUN. Nope.

OLD PEER. Who was that, just crossed your path, then?

BO'SUN. That was Newt, the ship's dog.

(CREW MEMBERS rush onstage.)

WATCH. Rocks straight ahead!

CREW. Rocks ahead!

OLD PEER. My bags! My cash box! Somebody bring them up!

BO'SUN. You think we've got time for that now?

OLD PEER. Captain — I was just kidding about —

CAPTAIN. The jib's torn off!

HELMSMAN. Dear God! The foresail's cracking!

WATCH. Rocks! Rocks straight ahead! Turn, goddamn it! Jesus Christ!

CAPTAIN. Brace for impact — every man for himself!

(The ship strikes. Noise and confusion.)

(Image of the ship sinking against a vision of SOLVEIG, now middle-aged, standing in the doorway of a home on the mountainside.)

SOLVEIG. The years may pass

The seasons change

And ewes grow into rams

But still, at night,

I hear your voice

Whisper in my dreams

God give you strength

And light your way

Until we meet again

And if you climb

To heaven's steps

We shall meet there too

Some day

Scene 9

(OLD PEER *struggles to stay afloat in the water, as a piece of wreckage floats up from beneath the waves.*)

OLD PEER. Help! Someone help me, I'm drowning!

(*He grabs onto the keel. The COOK comes up on the other side.*)

COOK. Dear God — help me get to land.

OLD PEER. Let go!

COOK. *You* let go!

OLD PEER. I said, let go!

COOK. No! I won't!

(*They fight. OLD PEER succeeds in disabling one of the COOK's hands, so that he clings fast with only the other.*)

OLD PEER. Now, let go, Cook! Didn't I tell you?

COOK. Have mercy, I beg you! Remember — I have a wife and children at home.

OLD PEER. So? I haven't had any children yet. I need my life more.

COOK. We can both hang on. You've had your life — I'm only twenty-five!

OLD PEER. We *can't* both hang on. You're too heavy! So let go! Goddamn it, drown, will you?

COOK. Have pity. At least wait and see — maybe the boat can—

(*OLD PEER strikes the COOK's good hand. He slips off with a scream.*)

COOK. Oh, god! My babies!

OLD PEER. Say your prayers while you've still got breath.

COOK. "Give us this day" — um, um —

OLD PEER. I can see why you wound up a cook. “Our daily bread.”

(COOK starts to go under.)

COOK. “Our daily bread ...”

(COOK sinks.)

OLD PEER. Amen, big fellow. I give you this much: you were true to yourself.

(Swings himself onto the boat.)

Well, where there’s life, there’s always hope.

(CANCER enters, wearing a mask but still smoking. He drifts alongside PEER’s boat.)

CANCER. Waterproof lighter?

OLD PEER. Not you again.

CANCER. Just we two — alone at last.

OLD PEER. Let go. There’s barely room for one!

CANCER. I’ll just swim along and hang on to the side by my nine-inch nails. Now, about your organs —

OLD PEER. Shut up!

CANCER. If you don’t want to smoke, I can still work with you.

OLD PEER. I said, shut up!

(Silence.)

OLD PEER. What are you doing?

CANCER. I’m shutting up.

OLD PEER. I can’t stand it.

CANCER. Just think of this as a growth experience.

OLD PEER. Clear out, you freak! I won’t die! I’ll make it to land, you’ll see!

CANCER. I'm sure you will. How can you possibly die? You're in every goddamn scene of the play.

(CANCER drifts off.)

Scene 10

(A road on the outskirts of PEER's hometown.)

OLD PEER. Home at last! I may have lost everything, but no matter what they take from me, they can't take away my dignity. At least Old Peer Gynt is still true to himself.

(VILLAGERS enter, including ASLAK, now old.)

PEER. Good morning.

ASLAK. 'Morning, sir, welcome. You're a stranger here.

OLD PEER. Quite a crowd today — a christening? Or a wedding feast?

ASLAK. More like a welcome-home party. My wife, Ingrid, has gone home to the earth.

OLD PEER. Your wife? I see. Now only the worms remain to fight over her.

ASLAK. She's sung her song. It's over, it's done.

OLD PEER. All songs end the same way. And they don't change — I learned that as a boy.

TEENAGER 1. *(Carrying a torn shirt:)* Look what I snagged! Peer Gynt wore this when he rode the reindeer near Gjendin!

TEENAGER 2. Four cents for his wineskin!

TEENAGER 3. Big deal! I picked up his old dagger for ten!

OLD PEER. Peer Gynt? Who was he?

(VILLAGERS and ASLAK spit on the ground, exit.)

OLD PEER. Well! Long time no see! All the old rivalries, the old quarrels — as if I never left. Once I wished for the cloak of

invisibility. Now, I'm actually wearing one. So why do I feel ... that I've suddenly become no more than a ghost?

(Two COIN INSPECTORS enter.)

COIN INSPECTORS. Whoa there, Speedy — where's the fire?

OLD PEER. I'm headed for a funeral.

COIN INSPECTORS. I bet. Your name wouldn't be Peer, would it?

OLD PEER. Yes, in fact, it is. Peer Gynt.

COIN INSPECTORS. Check off another one. Peer Gynt just happens to be the fellow we're looking for.

OLD PEER. You are? Why?

COIN INSPECTORS. We're Inspectors for the Royal Mint. My ID — damn, I had it here a second ago. You're coming with us back to the plant.

OLD PEER. What's going to happen to me there?

COIN INSPECTORS. You'll be melted down.

OLD PEER. Melted —

COIN INSPECTORS. We didn't come to chat. Our supervisor sent us to bring you in ASAP.

OLD PEER. But — but, you can't —! I mean, nobody warned me.

COIN INSPECTORS. Don't act stupid. That's how it's done — with births, the same as deaths. The big day's kept secret, and the winners usually start screaming their heads off.

OLD PEER. I guess that's true, but ... god, I can't see straight — who are you?

(They hand over ID.)

COIN INSPECTORS. Are you hard of hearing? Inspectors of the Royal Mint.

OLD PEER. So, Peer, it seems the time has come to face that final curtain. But, listen, I won't go without first saying — this stinks! I really I think deserve to be treated better. I mean, I'm not all that bad. Sure, I've cheated on my taxes, but so what? I'm not by any stretch of the imagination a world-class sinner!

COIN INSPECTORS. No one said you were. That's why you're not headed for hell, just back to the factory.

OLD PEER. Hell or a factory — what's the difference? The gallows or the guillotine both leave you dead. Away from me, Satan!

COIN INSPECTORS. Satan? What are you — a comedian? Wait'll the boys hear this.

OLD PEER. Out of my way! And don't come back!

COIN INSPECTORS. Buddy, you obviously haven't a clue, so we'll make this quick. As you said yourself, you're not a world-class sinner. To be honest, you're not even playing on the circuit!

OLD PEER. Now you're starting to talk sense.

COIN INSPECTORS. On the other hand, to call you virtuous — that wouldn't be right, either.

OLD PEER. I never said that I was.

COIN INSPECTORS. So you're average, plain Jane. Not like the old days — we met some sinners then who'd take your breath away. Giants of the field. Real transgression is a lot harder work than most people think. You can't get to hell just by being a weekend sinner.

OLD PEER. So, friends, since that's the case, I can just go on my merry way?

COIN INSPECTORS. No, friend, since that's the case, you get melted down.

OLD PEER. Did someone change the rules while I was overseas?

COIN INSPECTORS. It's been policy since Eve met Adam. You've never heard of recycling?

OLD PEER. You can't possibly think of melting me down with every Tom, Dick, and Harry to make something new!

COIN INSPECTORS. That's exactly the plan. You'll go into the next reissue.

OLD PEER. An old coin — how much could I possibly mean to your Master?

COIN INSPECTORS. Supervisor. You still possess some value as scrap — by the simple fact that you have within you the gift of life.

OLD PEER. No way! I'd rather face anything than that!

COIN INSPECTORS. Like you have a choice? You said yourself, you're not good enough for heaven.

PEER. No, I wouldn't aim that high. Send me down to hell — for a limited sentence, of course — a hundred years, if you insist. But this other idea — that Peer Gynt should simply vanish from the earth — as if his entire life had counted for nothing...

COIN INSPECTORS. Look, you were minted with a specific value. But you chose not to invest yourself in anything at all, and now, you're worn down and near-totally worthless. Which is why you go back to the plant to become — how do they say it? — one with the masses.

PEER. It's so unfair! Others — who have taken their lives lightly — yes, whether they continue to exist or not hardly makes a difference, I agree. But Peer Gynt has spent every day being true to himself.

COIN INSPECTORS. Says who? Where do you get these ideas?

PEER. So, so, so — Peer Gynt's been — who? — somebody else? That's the most ridiculous — What if I can prove I've been true to myself my whole life? Then will you admit you've made a mistake?

COIN INSPECTORS. Prove it? How?

PEER. I'll get witnesses. Depositions.

COIN INSPECTORS. You think *we're* tough? Try dealing with the office.

PEER. Let's say I'm out on parole. How could I possibly escape?

COIN INSPECTORS. OK, all right — but no funny stuff. You'll turn yourself in at the next crossroads.

(COIN INSPECTORS start to leave; then:)

PEER. One more thing: what exactly does it mean? By your definition — to be true to yourself?

(COIN INSPECTORS look at one another, shrug.)

COIN INSPECTORS. To be true to yourself means — that every now and then, you forget about yourself.

(COIN INSPECTORS exit.)

Scene 11

(OLD PEER rushes through the forest, in a panic.)

OLD PEER. A witness, a witness, where can I find one? Time is money — I think that's from the Bible. What's the world come to, when a man's got to search for proof of his own identity?

(TROLL KING enters, with a cup in hand. He is very old, and dressed in rags.)

TROLL KING. Spare change? Can you help me? I'm a Viennese vet.

OLD PEER. Sorry, I'm a little hard up myself just now.

TROLL KING. Oh my god! Prince Peer? Is it really you?

OLD PEER. Do I know you?

TROLL KING. “So, Mudboy — my daughter, you like?”

OLD PEER. No. It couldn't be ...

TROLL KING. It's *me* — the old King of the Dovre! Well, as you can see, I'm a little down on my luck these days.

OLD PEER. The Troll King! Yes! Fortune is with me again. A witness like you doesn't grow on trees. Listen, my dear sir, let's let bygones be bygones. I've gotten myself into a sort of situation. The long and short of it is, I need a character witness.

TROLL KING. An opportunity to serve my Lord?

OLD PEER. Remember the night I made that pass at your daughter?

TROLL KING. How could I forget, my Lord?

OLD PEER. What is all this “Lord” business? Anyway, you were going to turn me from Peer Gynt into a troll. And what did I do? I refused, I gave up your entire kingdom, just to remain Myself. Now, I want you to testify that to a couple of inspectors.

TROLL KING. My sovereign, I can't!

OLD PEER. What do you mean —?

TROLL KING. Under oath? But the truth is exactly the opposite of what you're asking me to swear.

OLD PEER. What are you talking about?

TROLL KING. You left the Ronde a complete and utter convert to our creed.

OLD PEER. What creed?

TROLL KING. The one that separates trolls from humans: “All that I can be, I already am!”

OLD PEER. “... I already am ...”

TROLL KING. By our motto, you have succeeded in the world. But — and this was your unique innovation — with

neither a horn nor a tail, you always managed to pass for human. Your brilliant deception has inspired us all!

(As proof, he waves his “Viennese vet” placard.)

OLD PEER. Wait. This is impossible. Me — a hill troll?

TROLL KING. Our most popular discussion host, Rush Ham-bone — he says, “The mark of a true troll can be found not in his horns, but in his heart.” Then cites you as his prime example. Think about it: while you were making your fortune, didn’t all your fancy meals taste like shit, your expensive wines like cat’s piss?

OLD PEER. Get out of my sight!

TROLL KING. My Lord! Mein Furher! Do not turn your face from me!

OLD PEER. I don’t want to hear another word — It can’t be true, it can’t!

(OLD PEER chases the TROLL KING from the stage.)

TROLL KING. No matter what you do to me, it will not take away your dignity!

Scene 12

(Immediately following.)

OLD PEER. What can I do now?

Maybe a verse of scripture will point my way
“From the dust hast thou come, and to dust —”

No, no, not that one.

Should I just give it all up?

Crawl beneath this tree?

Perhaps one day, they’ll plant a marker on this spot:

“Here lies Peer Gynt, ruler over ... over ...”

(He plucks an onion from the ground.)

Ruler? Listen to you, Peer. You just won’t give up
You’re no ruler, you’re no better than an onion

So now, Peer, let's dissect you
Find out what you're made of

(He starts to peel the onion.)

Here comes the dirty skin
That's the shipwrecked Peer.
In his lifeboat, clinging to hope
And — let's see — here's the passenger
Bitter and tough, but still with a hint
Of the old Gyntish flavor
Next comes the entrepreneur
His juice dried up a long time ago
This piece looks like a crown — very funny
Here's the scientist, so smug and short-lived
And — phew! — that's got to be the prophet
His words stinking up to high heaven
Now, what about this? All black and rotten
Black — hmmm — that could mean priests or slaves
And here's the man of the world
Look at him — gone completely limp

(He pulls off several layers at once.)

Christ! Everytime you peel one off, there's another
When do we get to the heart?

(He pulls the onion to bits.)

What am I saying? That's all there is!
Right down to the core
Layer after layer and finally
When you're all done, it's over, what's left?
Nothing, nothing at all

(A MAN IN A HURRY enters, wearing a priest's cassock and cowl.)

OLD PEER. Look — a priest! I'll confess everything to him. Is it possible there really exists some God who can deliver us from our sins?

(To MAN IN A HURRY:)

Good evening, Father. I must speak to you, on a matter of greatest importance.

MAN IN A HURRY. Sorry, I can't talk. You've mistaken me for someone I'm not.

(OLD PEER pulls off the MAN's cowl, revealing YOUNG PEER — referred to in this scene as "PEER." YOUNG PEER is the same age as at the end of Act I, wearing the same clothes beneath his monk's robe disguise.)

PEER. All right, stranger, it's better you not know my name. I'm an outlaw, there's a price on my head.

OLD PEER. Dear God, is it possible? Your name is Peer Gynt. You are on your way to the sea.

PEER. How do you —?

OLD PEER. I am also Peer Gynt. The one returning from the sea.

PEER. Then it's true. She told me, if I traveled this route, that I could catch a glimpse of my future. But you look like a common beggar.

OLD PEER. That's not true! I have done ...

PEER. Amazing things? Are you a king, an emperor?

OLD PEER. I have ruled in Egypt, been worshipped as a prophet, made fortunes in far-off ...

(He cannot continue.)

PEER. Go on!

OLD PEER. No, no — tear the horns from my head, the tail from my body ...

PEER. What are you babbling about?

OLD PEER. *(To heaven:)* Invisible Hand — at last, I will tear myself from your grasp.

PEER. Rubbish. I don't have to listen to this.

(OLD PEER grabs the knife from PEER's belt.)

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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