

ACT ONE**SCENE 1**

(Norway, 1895, a small farm in the interior. As the House Lights dim, the music of "Morning" is heard. The Stage Lights come up and we discover PEER GYNT sleeping onstage. The lighting is dappled and dreamlike but through the haze we can make out that the stage is set as a small run down farm. A section of fence, a hen house, a water trough and a small haystack can be seen. As the music grows stronger a procession of female ballet dancers appear onstage. Their costumes are frilly and lacy adding to the dreamlike quality of the scene. The dancers move towards PEER and awaken him. He dances with them but when he tries to touch them they deftly dance away from him leading him on a chase around the stage. As the music comes to an end PEER collapses exhausted in the same position in which we originally found him.)

Unseen to us, PEER's mother AASE has entered. She is short, feisty, cantankerous and highly opinionated. A widow, she and PEER manage to eke out a living from their small farm despite PEER's laziness and carousing nature. As the lights come up to full brightness she starts yelling at him and hitting him...)

AASE

Peer! Peer Gynt! You lazy good for nothing! Why haven't you milked the cow? And you haven't fed the chickens yet either, have you?

PEER

(trying to avoid the blows and get a word in edgewise)

Mother...Mother...I'm up...I was just taking...a...break...

AASE

(following him and still trying to hit him)

Taking a break? Taking a break, my foot! You haven't done a lick of work all morning. And where were you all day yesterday? Coming home in the middle of the night! Singing and laughing like a drunken bum, waking up the whole village, not to mention all the animals.

PEER

(realizing he was discovered)

Oh, you heard me...

AASE

It's a disgrace how the whole village knows that Peer Gynt sits around all day and lets his frail, little, old mother (she hits him)...

PEER

(rubbing his arm where AASE hit him)

Ow, that hurts!

AASE

(continuing without taking a breath)

...do all the work on the farm. You should see the looks I get when I go to church on Sunday. Someday I think they're going to take up a collection for me they pity me so...hey, that wouldn't be such a bad idea...

PEER

Now, now, sweet, ugly, little, old mother. Stop your story telling. You're becoming as bad as me.

AASE

Aha! (she hits him again) So you finally admit it!

PEER

(slowly, trying to worm his way out of his confession)

I admit that every once in a while I tell a little white lie...

AASE

(shaking her finger at him as she backs him into the haystack)

Little white lie? Little white lie? Oh you...Was it a little white lie when you told me about the fight with Aslak the blacksmith? Or being kidnapped by trolls? Or that nothing happened with that young girl from Harteigan? Or your latest story, about that reindeer?

PEER

Oh Mother, I swear by Odin it's true, every word! I swear it! (he kisses his hand and holds it up as an oath) It was high in the mountains. I heard his hoof crunch on the ice. I held my breath and listened. He was digging in the snow for moss. (he drops to his stomach and makes crawling motions) I slowly crawled my way towards him. (spreading the leaves of an invisible bush) I peeked through the leaves of a holly bush and...Oh, mother, you can't believe what I saw.

AASE

(not believing a word)

Oh, I'm sure of that!

PEER

I've never seen such a buck. Big as a house with a rack as large as a wagon.

AASE

Ha!

PEER

(miming his actions)

As quietly as I could I put my gun to my shoulder, pulled the hammer back, aimed and (shouting) BANG!...

AASE

(startled)

Ah!

PEER

...I shoot. He roars in pain. He staggers, and falls. The moment he falls I'm on him ready to plunge my knife into his heart, when AAAAAAAH!...

AASE

(startled)

Ah!

PEER

...The buck lets out a roar, stands on all fours and heads straight for the mountain ridge with me still on his back.

AASE

Oh my Lord!

PEER

For three miles he runs, right along the edge of the ridge. (he climbs up on the fence and manages to balance himself as he walks along its length) The ridge is as sharp as a knife and you can see straight down either side to the lakes more than four-thousand feet below. Suddenly the buck jumps high into the air and down we both plunge. (he jumps off the fence and disappears behind the haystack)

AASE

Oh Heavenly Father!

(PEER appears over the top of the haystack and tumbles down its side)

PEER

We fall together for an eternity. The black face of the mountain behind us and the cool, peaceful lake below. The water of the lake glimmers like a mirror. I can see our reflection growing larger and larger as we tumble through the air. Peer Gynt riding his mighty steed. Then, WHOOSH! (splashing in the water trough as he speaks) We crash into the lake in a shower of foam. We splash, we sink, we struggle and suffocate.

AASE

Dear Lord!

PEER

Somehow we both manage to swim to shore. (falling on his back) As I collapse I can still hear my heart pounding. (rising) When I awoke it was the next morning. (springing to his feet) I ran home as fast as I could and here I am.

AASE

But what happened to the buck?

PEER

(nonchalant)

I guess he's still out there somewhere.

AASE

(concerned and worried)

And you didn't break your neck or both your legs? Praise God for saving my son...(a realization)...Why you damn liar! I heard that story when I was a young girl. Dress up a lie, twist it and turn it and call it your own but it's still a lie...and the teller's still a liar.

PEER

(shaking his fist at her)

If anyone else spoke to me that way I'd turn him inside out and put him flat on his back.

AASE

Oh, Lord, take me now! Let me sleep in the earth and rest! All my prayers and tears won't make him behave. You never did what I told you to. You never obeyed, never went to church, never did anything that you were supposed to. You always had to do things your own way. You were never happy with your life. I told you to just be happy with yourself but you never listened. And now look at you, look at us, look at me! Is this any way to treat your mother?

PEER

(he's heard this all before, he smiles)

You pretty, little mother you, every word that you say is true, so just be happy, laugh...

AASE

Shut up! (she hits him) How can I be happy with a pig for a son? Don't you see how hard it is for me? A helpless, struggling widow always being put to shame. You scoundrel, you'll drive me to my grave yet!

PEER

You deserve better than that, sweet, ugly, little, old mother. The whole town will honor you someday, you just wait until I do something really big, really wonderful.

AASE

You?

PEER

Who knows what will happen?

AASE

Learn to patch your pants first.

PEER

I'll be a king! An emperor!

AASE

God help me. Now he's lost the little mind he had.

PEER

You'll see mother.

AASE

You might have made something of yourself. You might have even married into money. The Heggstad girl liked you. She could have been yours if you wanted.

PEER

You really think so?

AASE

Her father's a fool, and that's just the kind of father-in-law you would need. He's too old and weak to tell his daughter "no".

PEER

(to himself)

I always liked the way Ingrid looked.

AASE

A girl with land and a dowry. You could have had the girl and her money. You could be dressed like a bridegroom instead of standing there in rags.

(PEER grabs her hand and pulls her to come with him but she doesn't move and pulls him up short.)

PEER

Well, what are we waiting for? Let's go.

AASE

Where?

PEER

To Heggstad.

AASE

You won't find any one there to marry you.

PEER

What do you mean?

AASE

You're too late, just like for everything else.

PEER

What are you saying?

AASE

While you were away riding your reindeer through the air, Nils Nelson proposed...

PEER

Ha! That joke on women?

AASE

...and Ingrid accepted.

PEER

What? That can't be. Why?

AASE

I hear she got tired of waiting for you. And who could blame her?

PEER

Wait here while I harness the horse.

AASE

What for?

PEER

We're going to Heggstad.

AASE

It's no use the wedding's tomorrow.

PEER

We'll be there tonight.

AASE

Oh, Lord! Haven't I been shamed enough?

PEER

Don't worry sweet, ugly, little, old mother. Everything will be all right, you'll see. Come, forget the horse and wagon, I'll carry you to my wedding. (he picks her up)

AASE

Put me down you idiot!

PEER

To my wedding first. You speak for me, you're smart. Tell the old man that Nils isn't worthy of his daughter...

AASE

(she struggles in his grasp)

Let me go you hooligan!

PEER

...and that Peer Gynt will make a much better son-in-law.

AASE

Oh, I'll tell him about you, all right. Don't you fear...

PEER

Oh?

AASE

...and I won't stop until they set the dogs on you.

PEER

Maybe I better go alone. (he puts her down)

AASE

I'll follow right behind.

PEER

Mother, you're not strong enough...

AASE

I feel strong enough to crush rocks in my bare hands. (he picks her up again) What? Put me down! Put me down this instant!

PEER

Only if you promise...

AASE

Promise nothing! I'll let them know what kind of rascal you are.

PEER

I think you better stay here.

AASE

Not on your life.

PEER

This won't do at all.

(PEER carries AASE over to the hen house and puts her on the roof.)

AASE

What are you doing?!

PEER

Putting you on the hen house roof.

AASE

Don't you dare! Put me down!

PEER

Only if you're willing to listen to reason.

AASE

Take me down this instant, you good for nothing...

PEER

Now, now, mother.

AASE

I said put me down now!

PEER

Only if I can trust you to...

AASE

Oh, you can trust me...to tan your hide! (she kicks and waves her arms)

PEER

Sit still now, little mother. Don't kick...(she picks up a shingle and throws it at him)...or throw things, you're liable to hurt yourself.

AASE

It's not me who'll be hurt when I get down from here!

PEER

That's it, just sit still and be calm.

AASE

AAAAAAH!

PEER

And be quiet or you'll disturb the neighbors.

AASE

Oh, I'll disturb the neighbors all right...I'll disturb them with your screams when I get my hands on you...

PEER

I'll take that as your blessing on my journey.

AASE

I'll give you a blessing, just you wait! I'll give you what for, you worthless piece of...

PEER

Goodbye then, mother. I won't be long, just a day or two. Now remember, no kicking. (he exits)

AASE

Peer! Peer! You come back here this minute! Peer...he's really going. Oh my God, what am I going to do? Peer...help. Help! Someone get me down from here! Help!

(two women enter)

FIRST WOMAN

Who's that screaming?

AASE

It's me.

SECOND WOMAN

Aase, well, I see you're sitting high and mighty these days.

AASE

Aaah! Get me down from here! Fetch a ladder! Do something! Don't just stand there. Help me down. I've got to get to Heggstad before that good for nothing does.

FIRST WOMAN

You mean your son?

AASE

Who else?

FIRST WOMAN

To the wedding?

SECOND WOMAN

Oh my Lord! We've got to get you down from there. (yelling offstage) Anders! Eyvind! Come here quick!

MAN'S VOICE

What's the matter?

SECOND WOMAN

Peer Gynt's put his mother on the hen house roof!

(End Scene 1)