

ACT TWO**SCENE 1**

(As the house lights dim the opening sounds of the Arabian Dance can be heard. As the music swells the curtain rises to reveal what appears to be the tent of an Arabian prince. It is Arabia. The year is 1915, twenty years since the end of Act I. In a semicircle around a central dance area are several large, plush, heavily brocaded pillows. A large water pipe sits upstage next to a pillow-like throne where an older PEER GYNT is reclining and smoking. He is watching several dancing girls in seductive garments dance for his pleasure. The lead dancer is the slave girl ANITRA. She is the prettiest and most richly garbed. PEER claps his hands and the music comes to an end. The dancing girls take positions on the large pillows.)

PEER

(gesturing)

Anitra, my child, come here. You attract me.

ANITRA

(approaching)

Thank you, my Lord.

PEER

Now, don't be shy. It's all right to sit at the feet of the Prophet.

ANITRA

(she sits on a pillow at his feet)

The Prophet is kind.

PEER

Yes he is, isn't he? Yes, I have always been kind to the ladies. But that's another story. Have I ever told you how I came to be the Prophet?

ANITRA and DANCING GIRLS

No, my Lord. No, great Prophet. No, your highness.

PEER

Well, then I'll tell you. (taking a long look to his left and then to his right making sure no one else is within hearing distance) As long as there is no one around who could understand me any way. It's a pleasure being surrounded by such beauty...and such simplicity.

(PEER wanders amongst the girls, paying attention mostly to ANITRA, as he tells his story. The girls smile and laugh politely not really understanding what he is saying.)

But I digress...now, how I came to be a prophet. That sounds like a wonderful title for a book: "How I came to be a Prophet" by Peer Gynt. Not bad. Not bad at all. Too bad there isn't some one here who could write down everything I say. Perhaps if there was I wouldn't be a prophet. But on with my story. Did I ever tell you that I was married?

ANITRA and DANCING GIRLS

No, my Lord. No, great Prophet. No, your highness.

PEER

Well, not in the formal sense anyway. There was no priest or witnesses...(he pauses as he remembers then changes the subject) But another time I was nearly trapped. I lost my heart to a lady of royal birth. One of those ancient mountain families. There were circumstances that made it desirable that we should marry as quickly as possible. But her father started making demands that were really quite unreasonable, not to mention distasteful. I managed to escape with my honor, and everything else, intact.

My outlook on life entitles me to be called a philosopher. I am totally self taught. I've read a little about most things but most of my education comes from experience. Just look at my own career. Fortune smiled upon me as you can see.

I gave the masses what they wanted: Dark-skinned slaves and heathen images. I know, I know, you're all shocked. How could the Prophet do such a thing? Well, it wasn't easy. I may even say that I hated it at times. One thought always haunted me: "Who knows when Judgment Day will come?" Every Spring I sent them idols but then every Fall I exported missionaries.

PEER (continued)

Finally though it became too much. I couldn't go on. I purchased a plot of land and kept the last cargo of slaves for myself. I treated them very well, if I do say so myself. In fact I think I can say, without boasting, that I was a father to them...at least to some of them, anyway.

I was born in Norway but now I am a citizen of the world. In my travels I stumbled upon you children of nature. It was clear: your Messiah had come. I had no intention of deceiving you, but you so needed someone to worship and I was perfect for the job. Like all prophets I predict things that will happen long after I'm gone. So who can prove me wrong? And when someone takes exception to my words I simply shout: "The Prophet has spoken!"

ANITRA and DANCING GIRLS

The Prophet has spoken!

PEER

It's easy to be a prophet when there's no one to speak against you. And easy to be a master when you have such obedient slaves. (he takes ANITRA's hand and she rises) Come, Anitra, you shall accompany the Prophet this evening. We shall ride deep into the desert where my words, and your screams, won't be heard.

(PEER and ANITRA exit through a flap in the tent. The sound of them mounting a horse and the receding hoofbeats end the scene.)

(End Scene 1)