



### ACT I

Peer Gynt is the son of Jon and Åse Gynt. Jon Gynt, once a highly regarded and wealthy farmer, who frittered all the family money away on feasting and a lavish lifestyle. He was forced to take up work as a travelling salesman, leaving his wife and son behind in debt. Åse did her best to raise her son to restore the lost fortune of his father, but Peer is soon shown to be a useless, feckless individual, who spends his time writing poetry, womanizing and bragging about his imagined heroic exploits.

As the play opens, Peer gives an exaggerated account of a reindeer hunt that went awry. His mother scorns him for his vivid imagination and chastises him for spoiling his chances with Ingrid, the daughter of the richest farmer in the area. Peer goes to Ingrid's house, although her wedding to another man is scheduled for the following day, because he thinks he may still have a chance. His mother follows quickly to stop him from making a fool of himself.

At the wedding, Peer is taunted and laughed at by the other guests, especially the local blacksmith, Aslak, who holds a grudge after an earlier brawl. He meets the daughter of a family newly arrived in another valley, Solveig, and immediately falls in love with her. He asks her to dance, but she refuses, because her father would not approve and because Peer's reputation has preceded him. She leaves the wedding and Peer starts drinking. In his drunken state, he snatches Ingrid from her wedding and runs away to spend the night with her in the mountains.

### ACT II

Peer is exiled and, as he wanders the mountains, his mother, Solveig, and Solveig's father search for him. He comes across three amorous dairy-maids. He gets drunk with them and spends the next day alone suffering from a hangover. He runs head-first into a rock and knocks himself out. The rest of the act takes place in Peer's dreams. He meets a woman clad in green, who turns out to be the daughter of the troll mountain king. Together they ride into the mountain hall, and the troll king gives Peer the opportunity to become a troll if he will marry her. Peer agrees but then changes his mind. The troll king accuses him of making his daughter pregnant, which Peer denies. He insists he didn't touch her, but the wise troll king tells him that he begat the child in his head.

The troll king asks Peer what the difference is between a man and a troll. Peer doesn't know. The troll king enlightens him by saying that the human motto is to be true to yourself, whereas the troll motto is to be true to yourself and to hell with the world. From then on, Peer uses this as his motto, always proclaiming that he is himself, whatever that might be.

When Peer finally comes to, he's sees Helga, Solveig's sister, who gives him food and a message from her sister. Peer gives Helga a silver button for Solveig to keep and asks that she not forget him.

### ACT III

Living as an outlaw, Peer struggles to build his own cottage in the hills. Solveig arrives to live with him. She's made her choice, she says, and there will be no return for her. Peer is delighted and welcomes her with open arms. As she enters the cabin, an old woman in a green dress appears with a limping boy at her side. This is the green-clad woman from the mountain hall. She has cursed

Peer by forcing him to remember her, along with all his previous sins, whenever he's with Solveig. He decides to leave and tells Solveig he has something heavy to fetch. He returns in time for his mother's death, and then sets off overseas.

### ACT IV

Peer is away for many years, taking part in various activities and playing various roles, including a businessman engaged in enterprises on the coast of Morocco. Whilst there, he explains his view of life, and we learn that he is a businessman with dirty money on his hands. He's also been a missionary and a slave-trader. The friends that he's with rob him and leave him alone on the shore. Peer finds some stolen Bedouin clothing, which he puts on. In these clothes, he's hailed as a prophet by a local tribe. He tries to seduce Anitra, the chieftain's daughter, but she runs away. Then he decides to become a historian and travels to Egypt. He wanders through the desert, passing the Memnon and the Sphinx. As he addresses the Sphinx, he encounters the keeper of the local madhouse, himself insane, who regards Peer as the bringer of supreme wisdom. Peer comes to the madhouse and learns that all the patients live in their own worlds. In his youth, Peer had dreamt of becoming an emperor. In this place, he's finally hailed as one — the emperor of "self." Peer despairs and calls on God to help him.

### ACT V

Finally, on his way home as an old man, Peer is shipwrecked. Among those on board, he meets the Strange One, who wants to make use of his corpse to find out where dreams come from. This passenger scares Peer out of his wits. He survives and makes it to shore, bereft of all of his possessions, a pitiful and grumpy old man.

Back home in Norway, Peer Gynt attends a peasant funeral and an auction, where he offers for sale everything from his earlier life. The auction is held at the very farm where Ingrid's wedding was once held. As Peer stumbles along, he's confronted by all that he didn't do in life. His mother appears and claims that her deathbed went awry. Because he didn't lead her to heaven. Peer escapes and meets the Button-molder, sent by God, who tells Peer's soul must be melted down with other faulty goods unless he can explain when and where in life he has been "himself." Peer protests that he's only ever been that. He meets the troll king, who states that he's been a troll, not a man, most of his life. Peer looks for a priest to confess his sins and meets the Lean One, who's actually the Devil. He believes Peer cannot be counted as a real sinner bound for hell as he hasn't done anything bad enough.

Peer despairs, understanding that his life is forfeit, that he is nothing. At that moment, Solveig begins to sing. The cabin he built is close at hand. The button-molder shows up and demands a list of sins, but Peer has none to give, unless Solveig can vouch for him. He goes to her, asking her for his sins. She replies that he hasn't sinned at all. Peer is confused. He believes himself lost. He asks her: "Where has Peer Gynt been since we last met? Where was I as I should've been, whole and true, with the mark of God on my brow?" Solveig replies; "In my faith, in my hope, in my love." Peer screams, calls on his mother and hides himself in her arms. Solveig sings her lullaby for him as Peer passes away. In the corner of the cabin, the button-molder still waits, with the words: "Peer, we shall meet at the last cross-roads, and then we shall see if... ..I'll say no more."

