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Dramatic Publishing

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FROM THE PLAY BY J. HARTLEY MANNERS

PEG O' MY HEART

COMEDY ADAPTED BY LARRY RANDOLPH



PEG O' MY HEART

Comedy. Adapted by Larry Randolph from the play by J. Hartley Manners. Cast: 5m., 3w., 2 dogs. Peg O'Connell doesn't know what she's getting into when, fresh off the boat from America with just a parcel of clothes and her mongrel dog, she arrives at the English estate of her rich and not altogether gracious relatives. They are even less gracious than usual this day because things are in a bit of a mess: the bank in which they kept all their money has folded and all their money with it. The head of the manor, Mrs. Chichester, abhors the stigma of being poor and being forced to live with relatives she can't stand and who can't stand her. The grown and spoiled daughter of the family is contemplating running away with a married man to escape a life of poverty. The grown, idle and irritating son is faced with finding a job for the first time in his life, but he can't do anything! Their only financial hope is to take in Peg according to the wishes of a late and disliked relative and give her a "proper" education and social upbringing. This sparkling adaptation of the 1912 American classic retains all the wit, humor, romance and period charm of the original but keeps the action flowing and the pace brisk. *Peg o' My Heart* will steal your heart! *One int. set. Approximate running time: 1 hour, 40 minutes.*

Cover photo: Granbury Opera House, Granbury, Texas, featuring (l-r) Joshua Doss, Justin Hurt, Leah Anderson.

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This adaptation of *Peg o' My Heart* was first presented on March 19, 2004, at the Granbury Opera House, Granbury, Texas, as part of their regular 2004 season. This professional production was produced by Marty Van Kleeck and directed by the author. Scenic decor was by Dion Denevan, costumes by Drenda Lewis, lighting by Ana Pettit, and it was stage managed by Dwight Sandell. Original cast:

Mrs. Chichester Gene Raye Price
Jarvis Larry Grigsby
Ethel Courtney Damania
Alaric Justin Hurt
Christopher Brent Jeremy Johnson
Mr. Hawkes Larry Randolph
Peg O'Connell Leah Anderson
Gerald "Jerry" Adair Joshua Doss
Michael (Peg's dog) Blackjack
Pet (Ethel's dog) Tuffy

PEG O' MY HEART

CHARACTERS

MRS. MONICA CHICHESTER the mother
JARVIS the butler
ETHEL CHICHESTER the daughter
ALARIC CHICHESTER the son
CHRISTOPHER BRENT a friend of the family
MONTGOMERY HAWKES a lawyer
PEG O'CONNELL the cousin
GERALD "JERRY" ADAIR . . handsome young gentleman
PET Ethel's dog
MICHAEL Peg's dog

PLACE: The action is set in the Chichester home outside
London.

TIME: 1912.

ACT I – A morning in June.

ACT II – Scene i: A month later.

Scene ii: Later that evening.

Scene iii: The next morning.

Peg o' My Heart I love you
Peg o' My Heart I love you
I always knew it would be you
Since I heard your lilting laughter
It's your Irish heart I'm after

Peg o' My Heart your glances
Make my heart say "How's chances?"
Come be my own
Come make your home
In my heart

Words by Alfred Bryan
Music by Fred Fisher

ACT I

SCENE: *The living room. June 1912. Late morning.*

The room is in a fashionable country house that has been expanded over the years. This room has a decided Tudor flavor. The main unit is a staircase that goes from upstage of the French doors L, with a landing across the back wall and a walkway that extends to far DR with unseen exits to the upper floors and bedrooms. The R ground-floor exit is a set of double doors under this second-floor walkway. In other words, if an actor enters from the second-floor rooms he or she is standing above the double doors to the living room. The stairway itself is broken up by several small landings. These are important playing areas. The room is furnished in the elaborate style of the 19th century. DL, below the French doors which lead to the garden is a sitting arrangement of two armchairs with a table between them. Far R, below the double doors and against the wall is a small writing desk and chair. A small sofa and two end tables are against the back wall and below the main stair landing. An actor on the landing would be directly above this sofa. Two stained glass windows are L—one inset in the wall above the French doors and one on the level of the first landing of the staircase. The focus of the furniture arrangement is a large round table with two arm-

less chairs placed in the area between the desk and the L chairs and table.

AT RISE: *The room is empty. The French doors are open. We hear MRS. CHICHESTER give a loud wail from the garden area. Soon she enters through the French doors and is reading an official-looking letter. She gives another wail, finding it hard to believe what she is reading. This is not unusual for MRS. CHICHESTER since she finds it hard to believe a lot of the things that go on around her. The world has a way of leaving her perplexed. Right now, the world is doing just that yet once again. She starts to wail again but JARVIS, the butler, enters with a personal letter on a silver salver. His entrance stops MRS. CHICHESTER in mid-wail and she tries to compose herself. She takes the letter and absent-mindedly opens it still holding the official-looking letter. It is important that these letters be in two distinctly different envelopes—the personal one is colored stationary obviously from a lady. JARVIS starts to exit.*

MRS. C. Oh wait, Jarvis. My son. Miss Ethel at once. I must see them at once.

(JARVIS exits. MRS. CHICHESTER sits in one of the chairs L. She has a letter in each hand. She tries to read the personal one but is distracted by the official one. Every time she reads from the official one she lets out a wail. In response to the wailing, ETHEL enters onto the landing above the double doors. She is carrying a newspaper. ETHEL is MRS. CHICHESTER's daughter. She is, as we will discover, one of the unhappy products of

her society. She is attractive, selfish and bored. Needless to say, she is extremely well dressed.)

ETHEL (*from the landing*). Why, Mother!

(ALARIC enters through the double doors. He is ETHEL's brother and has gotten through life by doing absolutely nothing that resembled a day's work. He also has a very irritating laugh.)

ALARIC. Hello, Mater. Did you want to see me?

MRS. C (*between sobs*). Oh, my dear Ethel!

ALARIC. What's up?

MRS. C. Oh, my dear boy. Oh, Ethel!

ETHEL. Mother!

MRS. C. We're—we're—ruined. (*This last word comes out in a large sob.*)

ALARIC. Ruined? Go on! (*We hear that irritating laugh for the first time. As he laughs, he looks from his mother to ETHEL and back to his mother. Even ALARIC catches on that something is amiss. He stops mid-laugh.*)
Are we really?

MRS. C. Our bank has failed. Every penny your poor father left me was in it. We're— (*she can hardly bare to say the word*) b-b-beggars!

ALARIC. Oh tush, tush and nonsense. It can't be true.

MRS. C. Read! (*In her confusion she hands ALARIC the letter with the colored stationary.*)

ALARIC (*reading*). "My dearest Monica..."

(MRS. CHICHESTER catches her mistake, grabs the personal letter and hands ALARIC the letter from the

bank. ALARIC starts to read but is a bit slow on the up-take. ETHEL has by this time moved into the family circle and hands ALARIC the copy of the Morning Post.)

ETHEL. Look!

ALARIC (*reads the headline*). "Failure of Gifford's Bank!" (*He looks at the letter from the bank.*) "Gifford's Bank suspended business yesterday." (*He looks quickly between the paper and the letter and the light dawns.*) Gifford's Bank has closed its doors, eh?

MRS. C. Yes, we're ruined.

ETHEL (*with a strange lack of emotion. It's a statement not a comment*). Beggars.

ALARIC. Now that's what I call a downright rotten black-guardly shame. Closed its doors indeed. Why should it close its doors? That's what I want to know. Why—should—it? What right have banks to fail? Why isn't there a law against it. They should be made to open their doors. And keep 'em open. That's what we give 'em our money for—so that we can take it out when we want to.

MRS. C. Everything gone.

ALARIC. Nice kettle of fish. That's all I can say, eh, Ethel—

ETHEL. Pity!

ALARIC. Don't worry, Mater. I'll go down and tell 'em just what I think of 'em. They can't play the fool with me. You've got a son, thank God, and one no bank can take liberties with. What we put in there we've got to have out. That's all I can say, we've simply (*he stresses the next words by slapping the paper on top of the center table*) got—to—have—it—out. There, I've said it.

MRS. C (*even she understands the situation better than ALARIC*). It's bankrupt!

ETHEL. Failed!

MRS. C. We're beggars. I must live on charity for the rest of my life. The guest of relations I've hated the sight of—and who've hated me. Oh!

ALARIC. Don't you think we'll get anything?

ETHEL. Nothing!

ALARIC. I always thought bank directors were blighters. Good Lord, what a mess. What's to become of Ethel?

MRS. C. Whoever shelters me must take Ethel as well.

ALARIC. Shockin' tough, old girl.

ETHEL. No!

ALARIC. No? No what?

ETHEL. Charity.

ALARIC. Cold-blooded word. What will you do?

ETHEL. Work.

ALARIC (*that laugh again!*). What at?

ETHEL. Teach.

ALARIC. Teach? Who in the wide world can you teach?

ETHEL. Children.

ALARIC. A Chichester teach! (*He starts to laugh again.*)

ETHEL (*cuts him off, thankfully*). Settled.

ALARIC (*not to be outdone*). Very well then. I'll work too.

MRS. C (*the shame of it all!*). Oh, Alaric.

ALARIC. I'll put my hand to the plough. The more I think of it, the keener I am to begin. From today on I'll be a workin' man.

ETHEL. Ha!

ALARIC. And may I ask why that "Ha"? There's nothing I couldn't do if I was really put to it. Not a single thing.

MRS. C. I know that, dear, but it's dreadful to think of you— (*she can hardly say it*) w-w-working!

ALARIC. Not at all. I'm just tingling all over at the thought of it. Only reason I haven't so far is because I've never had to. But now that I have, I'll just buckle on my armor so to speak and astonish you all.

ETHEL. Ha!

ALARIC. Jerry's always telling me I ought to do something; that "The world is for the worker" and all that. Now I'm going to show him. He's coming today. All his family. They've taken "Noel's Folly" on the hill. He's sure to look in here. Couldn't be better. I'll put it to him as man to man.

(JARVIS has entered with a card on the tray. ALARIC's back is to him. JARVIS clears his throat. ALARIC turns, looks at JARVIS and turns back.)

ALARIC. I'll... (*JARVIS clears his throat again. ALARIC turns to him.*) What is it? (*JARVIS indicates the card.*)

Oh. (*ALARIC takes the card.*) Chris Brent?

MRS. C. Oh, I can't see anyone. (*She starts up the stairs.*)

ALARIC. Nor I. I'm all strung up. Tell Mr. Brent that—

ETHEL. I'll see Mr. Brent here. (*JARVIS exits.*)

MRS. C (*as she is going up the stairs and out*). My head's throbbing. I'll go to my room.

ALARIC. All right, Mother, and don't worry. Leave everything to me. I'll thrash the whole thing out; absolutely thrash it out. Awful business, Ethel.

ETHEL. Pretty bad.

ALARIC. Really goin' to teach?

ETHEL. Yes.

ALARIC (*as he starts toward the hall doors, leaving the newspaper and the letter from the bank on the large table*). Right. I'll find something, too. We'll pull through somehow. (*He is at the doors.*)

ETHEL. Mr. Brent's coming.

ALARIC. Oh yes. (*He turns at once and heads toward the garden.*) Jolly good of you to let him bore you. Hate the sight of the beggar myself. Always looks like the first conspirator in a play.

(He exits as JARVIS shows in CHRISTOPHER BRENT then leaves. Actually, ALARIC has displayed a bit of uncommon insight: CHRISTOPHER BRENT does look like the first conspirator in a play. He is also handsome, slick and has "Danger—Beware" written all over him. ETHEL has followed ALARIC to the French doors and now turns to look at BRENT. They are almost a room apart. He pauses and then quite steadily approaches ETHEL. She seems not to react. As he reaches her, he takes her in his arms and kisses her. She does not object but neither does she participate very much. After the kiss he holds her at arm's length, but is still holding her. She keeps a steady gaze on him.)

BRENT. How are you?

ETHEL. Fair.

BRENT. Your mother?

ETHEL. Lying down.

BRENT. Alaric?

ETHEL (*indicating with her head but not looking away from BRENT*). Out there.

BRENT. We've a moment or two alone?

ETHEL (*her gaze still constant*). Yes.

BRENT. Glad to see me?

ETHEL. Why not?

BRENT. I am to see you—more than glad.

ETHEL. Good.

BRENT (*blurting it out*). I'm at the crossroads!

ETHEL. Really?

BRENT. It came last night.

ETHEL. Oh?

BRENT. This is the end between me and my wife.

ETHEL (*this is a story she's heard before*). Is it?

BRENT. Yes, the end. It's been wretched. We've not one thought in common. There's not a word of mine, not an action she doesn't misunderstand.

ETHEL (*breaks away from him and crosses into the room*).
How boring.

(In the scene that follows we get a much clearer picture of ETHEL. She is capable of toying with BRENT, even capable of taking the upper hand—however, she also finds it hard to break away from his spell. And he is capable of casting a very strong spell!)

BRENT. She'd see harm even in this.

ETHEL. Why?

BRENT. She'd think I was here to—to—

ETHEL. What?

BRENT. Make love to you.

ETHEL. Well, aren't you?

BRENT. Does it offend you?

ETHEL. Ah, then you admit it.

BRENT. Oh, I wish I had the right to—

ETHEL. Yes?

BRENT. Make love to you straightforwardly.

ETHEL. It's because you haven't the right that you do it—
by suggestion.

BRENT (*a slight pause—is this a line, or what?*). What a
contemptible opinion you must have of me.

ETHEL. Then we're quits, aren't we?

BRENT. How?

ETHEL. Every married man has a contemptible opinion of
the woman he *covertly* makes love to. If he hadn't, he
couldn't do it.

BRENT. I don't follow you.

ETHEL (*by her change in attitude it's possible to see that
she does care for this man, poor girl. Her question is a
serious one*). What happened last night?

BRENT. I sound like a cad, blaming a woman.

ETHEL. Never mind how it sounds, tell me.

BRENT. The more I look at you and listen to you, the
more I realize I should never have married.

ETHEL. I'm sorry.

BRENT. For me?

ETHEL. For your wife.

BRENT. My wife?

ETHEL. Yes, aren't you? No? Just sorry for yourself!

BRENT. You think me purely selfish?

ETHEL. Naturally. (*With a laugh.*) I am.

BRENT. We quarreled last night—about you.

ETHEL (*does not react well to this*). Really! (*Pause.*)
Well?

BRENT. Ethel!

ETHEL. Oh, take some of the blame! Don't put it all on
the woman! (*Pause.*) What do you intend doing?

BRENT. Separate. The only thing left. You don't doctor a poisoned limb—you cut it off. When two lives generate poison, face it as a surgeon would. Amputate!

ETHEL. And if we generate poison—what will you do. Amputate me?

BRENT. Don't say that!

ETHEL (*delivering a direct hit*). The *new* has all the virtues?

BRENT. Don't say that! We have a common bond—understanding. I tell you I'm at the crossroads. (*Pause.*) Would you risk it?

ETHEL. What?

BRENT. The snubs of your friends, life in some little continental village. No, it wouldn't be fair to you.

ETHEL. No, I don't think it would. (*She moves away.*) However, I'll think it over and let you know.

BRENT. Would you marry me?

ETHEL. I never cross bridges until I reach them, and we're such a long way from that one, aren't we?

BRENT. Then I'm to wait?

ETHEL. Yes do. When I have to choose between charity and labor, some little continental village may beckon me.

BRENT. Charity and labor?

ETHEL. A tiresome bank has failed with all our sixpences locked up in it. (*Shows him the letter from the bank.*) Isn't it stupid?

BRENT. Is all your money gone?

ETHEL. Everything.

BRENT. Good God!

ETHEL. Dear Mother knows as little about business as she does about me. Until this morning she's always had a

rooted belief in her bank and in her daughter. If I bolt with you, her last cherished illusion will be destroyed.

BRENT. Let me take you out of it all.

ETHEL. No. Not just now. I'm not in the bolting mood today. Sometime perhaps in the dead of night, something will snap in me and the longing for adventure will come, then I'll send for you.

BRENT. I love you. I need you.

(He tries to kiss her and she holds him off. PEG appears at the French doors. She carries a battered suitcase, some parcels and a dog with hair that goes every which way. This is MICHAEL. Actually the same can almost be said of PEG. Much will be made of the fact that her unruly mop of red hair needs a lot of tending to simply keep it out of her eyes. The irony is, her hair would have been quite in fashion in this century but not in the social world of 1912. In spite of this and her hand-me-down clothes she is obviously a very pretty girl from an Irish/New York neighborhood. She watches ETHEL and BRENT briefly then quietly enters the room and sits L with her back to them. ETHEL has just evaded BRENT's kiss.)

ETHEL. Until the time comes for amputation? I don't want you to have illusions about me. I've none about you. Let us begin fair anyway. It will be so much easier when the end comes.

BRENT. There'll be no end. I love you. *(Kisses her hand.)*
I love you. *(Embraces her.)*

ETHEL (*pushing him away*). Please don't. It's so hot this morning. (*Sees PEG and crosses to her.*) How long have you been here?