

# **Dreams of an African Child**

**By Robin Graham**

**Based on a story by**  
**Robin Graham and Joseph Kove**

**145 Blackfriar Court**  
**St Simon Street, Salford M3 7FS**  
**England**

**0044-161-831-9385**

**[robin@feelgoodcommunities.org](mailto:robin@feelgoodcommunities.org)**

## **CHARACTERS:**

PETER: 16 years old: determined (fair, but angry young man)  
MARY: 18 years old: awkward (sad, downtrodden)  
MOTHER: late 40s: dutiful wife and mother  
FATHER: early 50s

## **LOCATION:**

Action takes place in a developing country such as Ghana in West Africa. It takes place in a large village by a large river; the river connects a large lake to the sea. It could be about a village near Sogakope on the River Volta.

The time is the present.

# **SCENE 1:**

**SATURDAY, LATE AFTERNOON. It is a little before sunset.**

*LIGHTS UP on three different locations in turn: the Family House (the main location), the River Ferry, and the Market. FATHER is relaxing at the Family House and MOTHER sells fish at the Market. The intention is to create the impression of calmness and stability, and to show that MOTHER works hard for the family. MARY is on the River Ferry, as is PETER, but they are far from each other. Action switches between the areas, either by using lighting and sound, or by “freezing” the action.*

## **Scene 1a:**

*LIGHTS UP ON THE COMMUNAL AREA OUTSIDE THE FAMILY HOUSE: FATHER is sitting on a bench, wearing sandals, a vest and trousers, happily watching the world go by. He is listening to Gospel music on the radio. It is hot. It is a lazy, relaxed Saturday afternoon. Finally, in the distance there is the sound of one blast of the river ferry’s horn. FATHER pays it no attention. CROSS FADE or FREEZE ACTION AND CROSS TO:*

## **Scene 1b:**

*THE MARKET: MOTHER wears a practical dress and sandals and is sitting behind a table on which is a large plate with pieces of cooked fish and a bowl with slices of onion and tomato. It is a busy market, with lots of noise, yet MOTHER is relaxed. She stands to serve a customer, selects two pieces of fish and puts them in a small plastic bag, then scoops (maybe with her right hand) some onion and tomato into another plastic bag. It is also for her a lazy, relaxed Saturday afternoon. In the distance there is the sound of one blast of the river ferry’s horn. MOTHER pays it no attention. She holds her hand out for money (payment). CROSS FADE or FREEZE ACTION AND CROSS TO:*

## **Scene 1c:**

*THE RIVER FERRY: MARY has a metal tray that still has a couple of pieces of fried fish on it. She dresses and moves around more like an old woman than a girl. PETER has a small/medium-sized bag with him and is sitting. He is trying to look confident and calm in his old clothes, but is anxious and excited. Sometimes he is lost in his own thoughts; sometimes he is looking around at people on the boat, and the riverbanks. He is trying to remember. He looks at Mary from time to time and it is clear that he wants to speak to her. MARY notices and thinks that he is flirting, so flirts back.*

*When PETER starts to talk, he addresses the audience directly like a NARRATOR. During the speech, he looks at MARY as he refers to her; she knows he is looking. Towards the end of the speech MARY comes over to Peter.*

*Note: for clarity, the words spoken by the Captain’s Mate are underlined.*

**PETER:** *(as Narrator)* There is a girl, here, on the river ferry, selling fish. I have been watching her. Wondering. Because maybe she is my sister. I ask the Captain's Mate, I say, "That girl, selling fish, how long has she been here?" He says, "As long as I can remember. Ever since she was a child." I ask him, "Every day?" He nods, and then adds "Except Sundays, of course." So I ask him, "What is her name?" He does not know. I ask, "Where does she live?" Now he smiles. "I can see you like her. She is a good girl." he says. He thinks he knows everything. He tells me the name of the village where she lives, a big big village, near where the new road bridge crosses the river. I recognise its name. I knew it; I had forgotten it.

*PETER takes a moment to look around.*

**PETER:** *(as Narrator)* I do not recognise the riverbanks. I have only travelled the river three times before today. Not like that girl.

*PETER takes looks around again. MARY comes over to him, unseen by PETER.*

**PETER:** *(as Narrator)* I have been sitting here for hours. I do not know how many times we have stopped to take on passengers and cargo. Maybe twenty, or thirty.

**MARY:** You have money for fish?

**PETER:** No. I do not think so.

**MARY:** *(starting to flirt)* Then why are you looking at me?

**PETER:** I wanted to... *(Pause)*

**MARY:** I have never seen you before.

**PETER:** You might have. I have not been here for a while.

**MARY:** I have been watching you.

**PETER:** You were watching me? Really?

**MARY:** Yes.

**PETER:** Why?

**MARY:** I wanted to. *(Pause)* You fancy me. I can tell.

**PETER:** No... I just want to talk to you.

*MARY is embarrassed. PETER backs away a little.*

**MARY:** *(defensively)* I feel sorry for you. You look lost. Just a lost, little boy.

*PETER is upset by this and turns away. Pause.*

*MARY laughs and walks away.*

**PETER:** *(Calling after her)* Mary?

*MARY is unsettled, stops in her tracks when she hears her name.*

**MARY:** How do you know my name? No-body here knows my name. *(Pause)* Someone is playing a joke. Who? I do not like surprises.

**PETER:** It is not a joke.

*There is a long pause while MARY realises.*

**MARY:** Peter?

*Pause, then MARY walks away guiltily. She goes to the farthest point of the boat, and stops, not looking back at PETER. PETER follows her and stops behind her.*

**PETER:** Mary.

**MARY:** I am busy. I have to sell all the fish. I always sell all the fish.

**PETER:** I am coming home!

**MARY:** Do not!

**PETER:** It has been eight years. And I am coming home.

**MARY:** We are happy. We do not want trouble.

**PETER:** I am not trouble.

**MARY:** Go away.

**PETER:** Where else can I go?

**MARY:** *(wanting to go off)* I am busy.

**PETER:** Sell your fish! Then take me back with you. I might not remember the way.

**MARY:** And if I say “no”?

**PETER:** Mary, I am coming back home.

*PETER walks back along the boat and sits and worries.*

*MARY places all the remaining pieces of fish into a plastic bag.*

*There is the sound of one blast of the river ferry's horn.*

*MARY races off the boat as CROSS FADE or FREEZE ACTION AND CROSS TO:*

## Scene 1d

*THE COMMUNAL AREA OUTSIDE THE FAMILY HOUSE:  
FATHER is still sitting on a bench listening to Gospel music on the radio.*

*MARY enters with the bag of fish and the tray. She has been hurrying. She has been watching the ground.*

**FATHER:** What is it child? *(Short pause)* What is it?

*MARY struggles to find the right words. Eventually she speaks:*

**MARY:** Peter is back...

*Silence.*

**MARY:** Peter is back!

**FATHER:** *(troubled)* Are you sure?

**MARY:** He was on the ferry.

**FATHER:** Did you talk to him?

**MARY:** Yes!

**FATHER:** How was he?

**MARY:** I do not know.

**FATHER:** Well, what did he say to you?

**MARY:** Nothing. I tried getting rid of him. He was looking at me. He knew it was me.

**FATHER:** Does your mother know?

**MARY:** I have not told her.

**FATHER:** This will upset her so much.

**MARY:** He wanted me to bring him here. But I was first off the boat. He had no chance to follow.. I was too quick for him.

**FATHER:** Good girl. You have given us time to think. *(Short pause)* Mary, I want you to go to the shop. Buy minerals. And beer. But first find your mother. Tell her gently.

*FATHER gives MARY money.*

**FATHER:** Get a move on, girl. Hurry!

*FATHER gives MARY money. MARY leaves. FATHER gets up, busies himself tidying, then stops suddenly and sits down again.*

**FATHER:** *(to himself)* Why? *(Pause)* Why?

CROSS FADE TO:

**Scene 1e:**

*THE MARKET:*

*MOTHER is sitting relaxed. MARY urgently approaches, and then slows as she nears MOTHER.*

**MOTHER:** Have you come to sit with me?

**MARY:** No, mother. You have to come. Now. To the house. You have to come.

**MOTHER:** What has happened?

**MARY:** It is Peter. He is back. He was on the ferry. I tried to get rid of him. He knew it was me. I have got to go now. Dad wants me to buy drinks.

**MOTHER:** Send one of your brothers to help me clear up. And hurry! Hurry, Mary!

*MARY leaves. MOTHER sits in disbelief. Then starts to pack her things as quickly as she can, but dropping some because her mind is elsewhere. She stops.*

**MOTHER:** *(To herself)* Peter is back. Peter is back! Peter is back!!!

**SCENE 2:**

**SATURDAY, EARLY EVENING. Just after sunset.**

*DURING THE SCENE CHANGE: FATHER lights the oil lamps. MARY brings the drinks and FATHER places them on the table; MARY goes inside.*

*LIGHTS UP ON THE COMMUNAL AREA OUTSIDE THE FAMILY HOUSE. FATHER is anxious. MOTHER comes out of the house. She is agitated; she is tidying herself. FATHER looks at her disapprovingly; he doesn't want to talk MOTHER starts justifying her efforts to look good...*

**MOTHER:** He is my little boy. *(Pause)* What will he make of us?

**FATHER:** Stop fussing! *(Pause)* Sit down!

*MOTHER sits. Anxious pause.*

**FATHER:** Where has he got to? What is he playing at now?

*Pause.*

**MOTHER:** I remember the day we sent him away. *(Pause)* I think I am going to cry.

*FATHER looks at her disapprovingly. They don't notice when PETER approaches. PETER stops. MOTHER and FATHER look round at him. PETER looks at his parents in silence for a short while.*

**PETER:** *(uncertain)* Hello.

**MOTHER (uncertain):** Hello.

**PETER:** Dad? *(Pause)* Mary said I would not be welcome. I had to see for myself.

**MOTHER:** You are welcome. You are! *(Pause)* How have you been?

**PETER:** I am fine. How are you?

**MOTHER:** I am very fine.

*Pause as PETER looks at FATHER*

**PETER:** Hello, Father.

**MOTHER:** We had no idea where you were. We came looking for you when “Aunty” died. You had been moved so often. We left it too long. We could not find you. I am so sorry. And here you are. My boy. Your brothers and sisters will be so excited.

*MOTHER cannot hold back her tears, but keeps looking at him.*

**PETER:** Mother, stop that.

*MOTHER goes to PETER and takes his hands.*

**MOTHER:** My little boy. *(Joking)* Let me see your teeth. And your hair. And your hands. *(Serious again)* They are rough hands. I do not remember them like that. Let me look at you. *(Joking again)* Tomorrow, in daylight, I will see how my little boy has turned out.

**PETER:** I do not want trouble.

**MOTHER:** There is no trouble. Come. Sit. Your father has bought drinks.

**FATHER:** He knew where to come then.

*PETER sits. FATHER doesn't move so the drinks remain untouched. Silence, then as PETER speaks, MARY comes out of the doorway.*

**PETER:** As I walked through the village, I kept trying to remember if I knew my way home. And I did. I passed the new children playing, and I remembered myself by the big tree at the old cemetery. I remember the church. I can still picture what it is like inside. And I remember the old school. It brought it all back to me.

**MOTHER:** That is forgotten now.

*MARY goes back inside. When FATHER talks, he talks to MOTHER and NOT to PETER.*

**FATHER:** He cannot turn up like this and expect to be fed and looked after. I have responsibilities.

**PETER:** *(to Father)* I will work. I have been working. You know I have.

**FATHER:** *(to Mother)* There are not any jobs here.

**PETER:** I will find something.

**FATHER:** *(to Mother)* Times are difficult.

**PETER:** Times here are always difficult. But I will not be a burden. Once was enough.

**FATHER:** See! This is the sort of arguments he caused. You remember the arguments? I thought we were over them.

**PETER:** Please stop this, Father! I never wanted to upset anyone. If I cannot come to my family, where would you have me go?

**MOTHER:** *(to Father)* He is staying here.

**FATHER:** *(to Mother)* What work can he do? I do not suppose he learnt to read or write.

**PETER:** *(to Father)* No. I cannot read properly. Nor write. But I swim. I fish. And I can learn a new trade.

**FATHER:** *(to Peter)* You should have stayed swimming and fishing where you were.

**PETER:** I had to leave.

**FATHER:** That does not surprise me. What did you do this time?

**PETER:** *(unconvincingly)* Nothing.

**FATHER:** You always were the bad one. Of all my eight children.

**PETER:** You know nothing!

**FATHER:** Do not talk to me like that. You are still my son. And I will discipline you if I have to.

**MOTHER:** Stop this! Just thank God he has come back

*Pause while they calm down.*

**PETER:** *(to Father)* So, am I welcome to stay?

**MOTHER:** We will make you welcome. *(To Father)* Won't we. *(Slight pause)* Won't we!

**FATHER:** *(to Mother)* He cannot just turn up here. What is he going to do?

**MOTHER:** *(To Peter)* You always used to go fishing with your father.



**FATHER:** He was eight!

**MOTHER:** *(to Father)* So? You can take him fishing with you again.

**FATHER:** Do not ask me to do that.

**MOTHER:** Then at least let him use your boat.

**FATHER:** He can use it. If he takes care of it.

**PETER:** I do not want to.

**MOTHER:** *(To Father)* Mary and I can always sell more fish. *(To Peter)* You had better start on Monday. You will earn some money. *(To Father)* Now talk to him. I have things to do for dinner. I am making something special! Talk to him. Talk to him!

*MOTHER goes inside. PETER and FATHER are silent for a while...*

**FATHER:** Drink?

**PETER:** Yes.

*FATHER opens a bottle of beer, then a bottle of a soft drink, which he gives to PETER. They drink in silence. FATHER drinks quickly, and starts to relax.*

**FATHER:** I have brought up my family. It is time for a rest.

*FATHER starts talking the thoughts as they come to him with pauses as appropriate. PETER gives him attention and respect, allowing FATHER the confidence to continue.*

**FATHER:** Your older brothers are established. They are helping me. Life is not so difficult these days. *(Pause)* I no longer fish as much as I used to. I still take the youngest with me. I stay at home more. I sleep sometimes. *(Pause)* You probably hate me.

**PETER:** No.

**FATHER:** Your oldest brother has a boat of his own now. And I have become respected at church. There are still worries and upsets of course. All of your grandparents have died since you left. *(Pause)* I feel bad for what happened. But Peter, you were a naughty boy. We had no choice. We did not have enough money. Not to look after all of you.

**PETER:** I know. *(Pause)* Dad, I know.

**FATHER:** Maybe you are not such a bad boy any more. *(Pause)* I feel more relaxed now. I still do not know what to say to you.

**PETER:** You are doing fine, Dad. This is where I belong. It is good to be back.

## SCENE 3:

### SUNDAY MORNING, OUTSIDE THE HOUSE.

*SCENE CHANGE: All of them change in to smart clothes for church. PETER is only part ready. FATHER doesn't put his shoes on.*

*LIGHTS UP ON: PETER is outside the house talking to MARY. He is sad. MARY listens like a good girl would, but her thoughts are clearly elsewhere.*

**PETER:** Day after day I dreamed about coming back. I dreamed that mum and dad would be sorry for what they did, they would ask me for forgiveness. That they would make me feel special. I would arrive to a great welcome. This was my dream. For eight years I was so lonely. I never dreamt beyond the moment I got back. *(Pause)* At least I am home. *(Pause)* You re not listening to me, are you!

**MARY:** I am. *(Pause)* Continue.

*PETER finishes dressing in silence.*

**PETER:** How do I look? Not my clothes. Not my shoes. But ready to sing and dance and clap for the Lord!

*MOTHER comes out of the house looking very smart. FATHER is with her not fully dressed and carrying his shoes; he gives them to MARY who starts to clean them.*

**MOTHER:** Let us go and thank God! I prayed you would return safely to me. When we thought you were dead... *(Pause)* I just want to look at you. Let me look at you! You are so smart!

*Maybe MOTHER starts to cry again (or is at least emotional). After a brief pause PETER and MOTHER hug each other. PETER also is emotional. They keep hugging.*

**FATHER:** Do not start crying, boy!

**PETER:** I just want someone to ask me how I am.

**FATHER:** What talk is that? We get on with life here.

**MOTHER:** No more disagreements! If you cannot yet be together in peace, I shall ask the pastor to teach you some peace!

*MARY finished cleaning the shoes; FATHER takes them from her and goes into the house. MARY stays outside listening. MOTHER and PETER stop hugging.*

**MOTHER:** Why so unhappy?

**PETER:** I keep remembering things. I do not want to remember, not the way I felt, the way I knew nothing, understood nothing. All I knew was that you were sending me away and everyone kept saying I had been a bad boy, but I was not a bad boy.

**MOTHER:** It is over now. We should all be happy.

**PETER:** I remember all the boys in the village playing. We would be footballers and soldiers, and airline pilots. But ever since you took me to the clinic in Sogakope, I secretly dreamt of being a doctor. I never told anyone. You would have laughed at me and then it would never have happened. And it could have happened, couldn't it. When I went away, and I was beaten, or made to kneel in the corner with my arms outstretched as punishment for nothing and I would not know why, and when I was sent to sleep without food because someone made up lies about me to get me in to trouble, always then I would imagine I was a doctor in a white coat, in a hospital, helping the sick, and I would be able to make them better. And I would be able to make myself better too. Because in my dream I was important, doing something good with my life. But how can I be a doctor? You took me away from school when I was eight. I can hardly read and write. How can I study now? Who is going to pay my school fees? I do not even have even money for food? You, and father, you destroyed my dreams. You destroyed my future. What is God's will for me now?

**MOTHER:** We were poor!

**PETER:** So?

**MOTHER:** I do not want this. Do not make me justify what we did. We had no choice. "Aunty" said she would find someone to take care of you. We prayed you should be with good people. But you knew what went on. We heard stories. So when "Aunty" died, and we had no idea who she had passed you on to, and we heard no more about you, we thought that you had drowned in the lake like other boys who were made to go there.

**PETER:** How much did she give you for me? Eh?

**MOTHER:** Stop pushing me away.

**PETER:** How much did you sell my life's dream for? I have a right to know. Mum?

**MOTHER:** Five dollars.

**PETER:** Five dollars! You sold me for five dollars!

**MOTHER:** That was all anyone got. And a promise of a better life for you and for all of us.

*PETER is distressed and walks away in disbelief. FATHER comes out of the house.*

**MOTHER:** *(calling Peter)* Let us go to church.

**PETER:** *(calling back)* I am not going to church.

*PETER leaves. MOTHER sits.*

**FATHER:** *(irritated)* Where is he going?

**MOTHER:** For a walk. He will come back.

**FATHER:** What is he angry about this time?

**MOTHER:** Nothing. I thought you two were getting on better.

**FATHER:** I cannot just change. All night I hardly slept, wondering if you are doing the right thing.

**MOTHER:** We are.

**FATHER:** You see what he is really like.

**MOTHER:** He is upset.

**FATHER:** You would have thought he would learn some respect by now.

**MOTHER:** I want to go to church.

**FATHER:** You think I have not thought about him? I have! You know he was turning into a troublesome boy.

**MOTHER:** I never saw it.

*MOTHER starts towards church.*

**FATHER:** You think my conscience is clear?

**MOTHER:** I never saw it!

**FATHER:** We did the right thing. We had to make a sacrifice. Someone had to go. We have eight children! Peter was old enough to be sent away, but he was not old enough to be earning us money. What life would he have had here? I need you to support me on this. And if he stays, he behaves like every member of this family. We cannot make up for the time he lost. *(To Mary)* Mary, you were close to him. You talk to him. Remind him that you were working on the boat. That you had no education. That you worked hard. Tell him that he has been treated exactly the same way. And tell him it was all his own fault. He was a bad boy. And tell him if he does anything wrong he will be thrown out of this family once and for all. I will not have him here, making me feel guilty every time he looks at me. If he is not back after church, find him and tell him. And Mary, tell him you think he should go.

## SCENE 4:

### SUNDAY AFTERNOON. ON THE RIVERBANK.

*PETER is sitting by the river, thinking. MARY, troubled, comes up from behind him.*

**PETER:** *(philosophically)* What is wrong, Mary?

**MARY:** *(guiltily)* Nothing. *(Pause, then changing the subject)* It is nice here. I sometimes come here. I like to listen to the ripples against the riverbank. Watch the water go by. It is such a strong river.

**PETER:** They say if you go swimming where the river meets the sea, you'll be sucked down and never come up again. That is how my life feels.

**MARY:** I am sorry you went away. I missed you so much. I would lie awake at night wondering where you were.

**PETER:** And I missed you. I missed all this. I missed growing up with you, being part of this family. I even missed fishing with father after school.

**MARY:** Every day I looked for you on the boat, to see if you were coming home. Then mum and dad said you would not ever be back. So I stopped being scared of seeing you, you coming up to me and telling me you hated me.

**PETER:** *(bemused)* Why would I do that?

**MARY:** Because I stayed.

**PETER:** I do not hate you. I do not hate anyone.

**MARY:** I wish you had not gone.

**PETER:** I used to hope somebody would find me, that you would come to see me. On my birthday or a holiday. Every year I hoped. Until I lost hope. Mary, I lost hope. I thought about running away, but I was too young, and there was nowhere to go. I stayed on. And on. Until my master stopped beating me. He got new boys, and they took the punishment. So I stayed on more.

**MARY:** I am really sorry.

**PETER:** I had a friend once. A new boy. I laughed at him because he was sick when we took the boat out, because he had never been in a boat and he was scared and could not swim. One day, he was made to swim, down to the bottom of the lake to untangle the nets that had got caught up. He never came back to the surface. He had said he could not swim. The master said it was my fault he died because it was my turn to jump in that day and I convinced him it was not. *(Pause)* See! I learnt to survive, do as I was told and not misbehave. It was better to have an easy life. *(Pause)* Are you listening to me?

*MARY starts afresh, giving the message from her father. She finds this difficult.*

**MARY:** Peter, if you stay, you must forget all this; behave like every other member of the family.

**PETER:** Of course.

**MARY:** They hurt us both. Remember how it was? I have been on the ferry every day for all these years. I had no chance to go to school and learn. I have worked hard for this family. Then they did the same to you. Made you go away, work hard for this family. They said you were a bad boy; it was your own fault.

**PETER:** But I was not. You know that.

**MARY:** (*upset*) If you cannot behave properly, then go away now. If you even do one thing wrong, they will make you leave and never let you back.

**PETER:** Everything will be fine. I am not making trouble; I want to stay! I am an uncle now! You are an aunt! We are here to stay. (*Pause*) Mary, what is wrong?

**MARY:** (*very upset*) I cannot read! I cannot write! What future do I have? Selling fish on the ferry until I am so tired. What man will marry me? Not a good man. Do not tell me everything will be all right! You know nothing! We have nothing!

*MARY runs off. PETER watches her. He is troubled.*

**PETER:** (*To himself*) Is that what we have? Nothing? Do not think like that, Mary. Do not make me think like that!

*PETER sits and ponders for a while.*

**PETER:** Not any more. I have thought like that for too long. Not anymore!

*PETER gets up and follows Mary.*

## SCENE 5:

### SUNDAY AFTERNOON. AT THE FAMILY HOUSE.

*SCENE CHANGE: MARY returns; MOTHER and FATHER sit outside the house.*

*LIGHTS UP ON: MOTHER and FATHER listen to MARY who is awkward and upset. PETER turns up unseen, maybe stops to do up a shoelace, and overhears...*

**MARY:** I did as you told me.

**FATHER:** Where was he?

**MARY:** By the river.

**FATHER:** Just him being here makes me so angry. Now we will wait.

**MARY:** For him to do something you do not like? He was a good boy.

**FATHER:** *(to Mary)* Have you forgotten? You are the one who told us he was missing school. You are the one who told us he made you take him on the river ferry. You are the one who always told us what a disobedient child he was. Without you, Mary, we would never have known. For that, we thank God. So do not say he was a good boy.

**MARY:** I was a child. I could have been wrong.

**FATHER:** When you start bad, no one knows where you will end up. Did you ask him why he is here?

**MARY:** No.

**FATHER:** Well, you are going to find out! Ask him for me.

**MOTHER:** I will talk with him.

**FATHER:** Mary will do it. He is up to something! He was happy to stay away for so long. Do not be taken in by him. Both of you take care! Do not be fooled by him now. Mary, watch him for me. And for your mother. He trusts you. You will see him make a mistake. And you will tell me everything. That is right. Isn't it, Mother?

**MOTHER:** I do not know.

**FATHER:** Mother, in the bible you will find your guidance.

*PETER enters. The others do not know he was listening.*

**PETER:** Do not let me disturb you.

**FATHER:** *(Politely)* Are you taking my boat on the river tomorrow, son?

**PETER:** I hope so.

**FATHER:** Good.

**PETER:** Or Tuesday.

**FATHER:** You will take it tomorrow. You said you would support yourself.

**PETER:** I have things to think through.

**FATHER:** *(To Mother)* See! It has started again!

**PETER:** What has started?

**MOTHER:** Peter, be quiet.

**PETER:** What have I done now? What did I ever do wrong except believe you cared about me?

**FATHER:** Ask Mary.

**PETER:** Your spy?

**FATHER:** She was a good girl. She told us everything. She told us you made her take you on the ferry, even though it meant you would miss school. Do you know how hard we worked just to pay your school fees? We loved you too much to see what was happening.

*PETER and MARY exchange glances.*

**PETER:** What else did she tell you? Well?

**FATHER:** Do not talk to me like that!

**PETER:** I have a right to know.

**FATHER:** You have no rights in this house.

*FATHER turns and walks away.*

**PETER:** Do not walk away!

*FATHER comes back and slaps PETER. They stare at each other and then FATHER walks off. PETER stares at MARY. MARY is very awkward. There is a long silence, and then Mary suddenly speaks.*

**MARY:** I have had to live with my lies every day. And look at me! What am I now? I was eight when they sent me on the ferry. Sell fish, they said. I was good at it. People liked the fish the little girl sold. So they took me out of school and made me go every day. How do you think I felt when I saw how they loved you and gave you treats they bought with the money I earned yet gave me nothing. Yes, I tricked you onto the boat and made you stay on board with me. I made you see what my life was like. Then mum and dad started thinking you were bad. It was so easy to tell more tales. When “Aunty” came along and offered to take you, I never thought you would go because they loved you so much. I never thought. I was a little girl. They believed what they wanted to believe. Do not be angry with mum and dad. Be angry with me. *(To Mother)* I sold Peter. They say it was dad, but



really I sold Peter. He was always your favourite. And once he had gone, I felt so good. You said I was a good girl. And you let me keep a little of the money I earned.

*MOTHER is furious. She turns away from MARY, and if necessary keeps turning away from her / pushes her away when she tries to hug Mother. PETER lets it happen. MOTHER looks at PETER; he turns away but she still comes over and hugs him. He hugs her back.*

**PETER:** Hug the small boy you sent away.

**SCENE 6:**  
**SUNDAY LATE AFTERNOON. AT THE FAMILY HOUSE.**

*LIGHTS UP ON: MOTHER, FATHER, PETER and MARY are together in silence.*

**MOTHER:** *(To Father)* Mary has something to say.

**FATHER:** This is a weekend for surprises. Well, Mary, what has your brother done now? *(Pause)*

**MOTHER:** The truth, Mary.

**MARY:** You are all looking at me. How do you expect me to tell you?

**FATHER:** Give her time.

**PETER:** Tell the truth.

**FATHER:** Be quiet!

**PETER:** No.

**FATHER:** You will be quiet, or I will beat you.

*PETER stands in confrontational mood.*

**PETER:** *(mocking)* Like all the merciless beatings I got from my Master at the lake? I cannot contain my joy at the truth finally being told. *(Seriously)* So tell it! Start to undo everything that has been unjust by just telling the truth.

**MARY:** Everyone thinks I am a good girl. Everyone likes Mary.

**PETER:** I shall tell you. For eight years I was on that Lake. Fishing for my master, fetching for my master, repairing his nets, cleaning his boat, doing chores in his house every hour I was awake. They would feed me maybe once a day, and if I was lucky I would get four hours sleep. When I said I was tired, they would whip me with a stick, and still make me dive to untangle the nets. Clothes scruffy, torn, smelly. And when I was ill, I begged my master to help me, but I was not allowed to be sick.

**FATHER:** You were a bad boy.

**PETER:** Not me. I grew up. Quickly. Learnt to do as I was told. Then there were new boys. Who were punished by me. Because it was me who took them out in the boat. My master started giving me money. Small money. Then a few days ago, I took three new boys onto the lake. The nets were caught, as usual, on the bottom, and it was me who ordered the boys out of the boat. No one told me they were from the countryside. No one told me they could not swim. No one told me. They were shouting that they could not do it. We were all standing and shouting. Their bodies were so small and helpless as they floated with the tide away from the shore. The boat had capsized. The three new boys died. My Master tried to beat me. I am too big to be beaten. He is old now, been sitting in the house too long. In the past he had made promises he had never kept - promises of freedom. Now he made a promise and meant it. To have his sons beat me, and when he was not watching, I put my things in a bag. I had nothing to speak of. A few clothes a friend made for me. I told my master I was going to mend the nets, walked from the house, ran along the shore. I knew I

came from along the river. I did not remember where. But little by little, in just a few days, I made my way here. That is why I came home. Because you destroyed my dreams and have replaced them with nightmares. Now I know why: Mary lied to you about me. Tell him, Mary!

**MARY:** Forgive me, Peter. Please forgive me.

**FATHER:** You were a bad boy.

**MOTHER:** He was not. She lied! She made all the rows in this house happen.

**PETER:** *(to Father)* You did this to me! Now tell me you are sorry!

**FATHER:** No!

**PETER:** You hide from the truth like you hide from your shame!

**FATHER:** How dare you speak to me like that in my own house?

*FATHER grabs the nearest stick, and goes to beat PETER.*

**FATHER:** I said he was a bad boy!

*PETER explodes in rage and fights the stick away from FATHER. In the fight, FATHER falls to the ground. PETER stands over him, holding the stick, ready and preparing to beat FATHER. FATHER is afraid and cowers each time when PETER's anger grows. But PETER NEVER hits FATHER.*

**PETER:** Like all the merciless beatings I received from my Master? You sold me for five dollars.

**FATHER:** They said you would be cared for, looked after, fed, taught a profession...

**PETER:** You believed that? Surely you knew it was lies? You heard the stories that came back from the lake. Do not pretend you did not know. Well now I am back. Keep watching for me, father. I have no love for you and no respect. Keep looking out for me because I am no longer a child. I stopped being a child when I was eight years old.

**FATHER:** So this is how you turned out to be!

**PETER:** And this is how you turned out to be! A coward. A liar. With no respect for human dignity. You think I can just get on with life? I want you to know what you put me through, what I have lived with for the past eight years.

**FATHER:** I will tell people if you beat me. I will have you arrested!

**PETER:** And have the world know your business? I do not think so!

**FATHER:** So what now? Steal? Go to prison. Be executed for all I care! You were bad and always have been.

**MOTHER:** Peter, leave your father alone! Look at me! Look! I have been quiet for too long. I should have spoken up eight years ago. Then you would never have been sent away. I was only doing what I was taught to do and I kept quiet. I do not want to any more. I see what I did to you and I can never make it up to you. A lie is what this family has lived on, and the

guilt of all of us has torn us to shreds. This family must heal itself now. Be honest with itself. I love you so much and I always have. It hurts so much to think I might let you go away once again without speaking out. But I will give you money. We need some time.

*PETER throws the stick to one side. He turns away from his FATHER. FATHER grabs the stick and comes at PETER. PETER turns round, and FATHER stops in his tracks.*

**PETER:** You will not tell the world. But I will!

**MOTHER:** We have savings. Take the money.

**PETER:** Get it. Get it all. And with it buy Mary an education.

**FATHER:** Take the money.

**PETER:** Send her to school! At least she said sorry.

**FATHER:** Now leave us. There is nothing for you here. You are no son of mine.

**PETER:** You are wrong, Father. I am! And I shall always be around the next corner. Telling the world about you. You will get weaker, until you will be waiting for me, watching for me, knowing that at any time I am coming back. I shall make sure you know the life of fear you sent me to. Send me away again? I have seven brothers and sisters. No. I once had dreams. Five dollars! You sold me for five dollars!

**MOTHER:** It is not too late.

**PETER:** No, it is not too late. I may never be a doctor in a white coat in a hospital, but I can save lives by telling the world what you did.

**MARY:** Let me come with you.

*PETER packs his bag and leaves.*

**MOTHER:** Where are you going?

**PETER:** To find three families and tell them their sons have died. And tell them why.  
*PETER leaves alone, leaving MARY, MOTHER and FATHER.*

---