

Shadows

A short play about Solomon Islands in the 19th Century

FACTS: *Between 1871 and 1903 the “blackbirder” slave traders kidnapped over thirty thousand men from the Solomon Islanders and took them to work in the sugar cane fields of Fiji and Australia.*

Actors

Peter – who acts as the Narrator

Father

Mother

Mary

Grace

Matthew

NARRATOR: My name is Peter and my story begins a long time ago. I live on the island of Malaita, I have always lived there. I was a happy child. But I have no father. I don't know where he has gone. Father just vanished one day. But, I can still remember him. He was full of laughter and his eyes were dark and he had a beautiful skin. His voice was big. He used to pick me up and play with me. When he talked with friends he sounded like ten men... One night I saw him in my dreams. He was talking to me.

FATHER: Peter. My son. When I look over the ocean I know there is much money there. We are poor. I want to earn money for our family. There are other countries we cannot see from here. But big ships come here. The white men have money and good clothes and they eat many types of food. One day, you and I will go to one of these countries.

PETER: My mother used to tell me a story about the tall ships of the white man.

MOTHER: Peter. Your father talks about other countries and the ships that come from there, but we must be careful. Strange things happen when these big ships come to Malaita. I remember a time when ten of our strongest young men went on the white man's ship from overseas. They were asked to go for a party. A white man came to our village and gave all the young men money and clothes and asked them to come to his ship to see it. We never saw them again.

PETER: Were they taken by ghosts' mother?

MOTHER: No one knows what happened to them. We looked everywhere for them, but they were gone.

PETER: Were they playing games to hide from you? Perhaps it was a trick? Sometimes I trick you mother. But you always find out.

MOTHER: All the men in the village looked for the boys. They looked for one whole day. The boys had gone and so had the ship. They never came back. Never.

PETER: But why did the boys not come back?

MOTHER: No-one knows. They went away on the ship or they died in the sea. The families cried for their sons. But it was no use. Their children were gone. Then one day another big ship came with white men. Your father was asked with other men from our village to go to the ship as he was our village leader. He told the young men not to go. He said he would go first to find out what was on the ship. Then he would come back to the village to tell us what he saw.

PETER: What did he see?

MOTHER: (*sad*) Your father never came back. He promised he would, but he never came back. Then in the morning the villagers saw the big ship had gone. That was a long time ago. Often at night I go outside and I think I see your father, but it is only a shadow in a tree. Sometimes I think I hear his voice.

PETER: Is father still alive?

MOTHER: I hope so. I think he is. But I think he is in another country.

PETER: But why would father go away and not tell us where he was going?

MOTHER: He would not. Father was honest and he loved us. I think something bad happened to him.

PETER: Was he taken by ghosts, mother? I am frightened.

MOTHER: I don't think so, my son. No ghosts. Something happened on the ship. Something bad. I don't know what.

PETER: I will find him, mother. I will find father. I will go overseas and find him.

SFX: KNOCKING ON DOOR AND CALLING Hello. Hello. **(off microphone)**

MOTHER: Hello, it's Mary. Come in auntie.

MARY: I was passing by. I have some bananas for you from my garden.

MOTHER: Thank you.

MARY: And Peter. You are looking happy. What have you been doing?

PETER: I am going to look for my father. I want to bring him home. He's a long way away.

MARY: That's a big job. How will you find him?

PETER: Mother thinks he might have been taken away by people on a big ship with the white men that come here.

MARY: I lost my oldest brother when he went onto the white man's ship. He was asked to go and look at the ship and he never came back.

PETER: I will find your brother too.

MARY: I wish you would. If you do. You will recognise him by the blue shirt I made him.

MOTHER: Peter. Your father always wore a special necklace. I made it for him from shells I picked up on the beach.

MARY: I remember that necklace. I was playing with you on the beach when we collected the shells. One shell was a beautiful blue.

MOTHER: Yes, I said it looked like the colour of the sky.

MARY: It took us along time to made the necklace as we wanted the blue shell to be exactly in the middle.

MOTHER: I gave it to your father when we married. He promised to wear it all his life.

PETER: Well. When I grow up, I will go and look for my father and your brother. Do you know what country they went to live in?

MOTHER: No.

MARY: I have heard stories that they were taken to Fiji and Australia.

NARRATOR: (Peter) But I never did not go overseas. I grew up in Malaita. Many years later when I was a man I married. I now have one daughter and three sons. My daughter Grace looks after my mother who is old. Often mother sits on the beach, looks at the sea and talks to Grace. She tells the story she told me about how her husband was taken away by the white men when he went to see their ship. I have learned about the ships and stealing people from Grace's teacher, Matthew. So, I asked him to come to our house to meet my mother. She was talking with Grace. We all met on the beach

MOTHER: I don't want to die, Grace, until I know what happened to my husband. It's now over thirty years since he vanished.

GRACE: Mother, I will try to find out. I will ask questions. We have a new teacher at school. He might know. Oh, here he is coming now and talking with my father.

MOTHER: Hello Mr. Matthew. Hello Peter. Please sit down.

GRACE: Good afternoon, teacher.

MATTHEW: Good afternoon, Grace

PETER: Mr Matthew knows some facts about what happened to our men who went on the white mans' ships. He has been reading history books.

MATTHEW: The men were tricked. Sailors told them there were wonderful things to be seen on the ship. They promised our men that they would get gifts for their families. They gave our boys drinks like beer. The boys became drunk. They were locked up in cabins. Then they were tied up with rope and chains and treated like slaves.

MOTHER: What a horrible story.

MATTHEW: The ships sailed to Fiji and Australia. The men were made to work in the sugar cane fields.

MOTHER: Could the men escape?

MATTHEW: No. I was too difficult. But we know that some men were so unhappy they jumped over the side of the ship before it reached the foreign country. They were drowned.

MOTHER: My husband would never do that. He is a brave man.

MATTHEW: The white men had a name for what they did. It was called “blackbirding”. It was a very cruel name. I think it meant that the captains of the white ships did not care for the Solomon Islanders and saw them as birds to be caught and taken to Australia and Fiji.

MOTHER: What happened to these Solomon Islanders?

MATTHEW: Some were sold and they were made to work on the sugar cane fields.

MOTHER: Did any of the Solomon Islanders ever come home?

MATTHEW: I don’t know of any. These were poor people. Some died. Some married and had children. They stayed forever. It’s a sad story, but it happened a long time ago. It does not happen anymore. People do go overseas to work, but they come back.

GRACE: Mother, Father. I want to go and look for our grandfather. Maybe he is still alive in Australia or Fiji.

PETER: One day. But when you get older you are going to the Don Bosco College in Honiara. You will study there and get a certificate. Then maybe you can get a job overseas.

NARRATOR: (Peter) My daughter Grace worked hard, qualified with high marks from the Don Bosco Technical Institute and she got a job in Gizo. She worked hard and two years later she was asked to work at the Solomon Islands embassy in Fiji. We were so proud of her. One day she phoned me from Suva and said she was going to find out about her grandfather. We waited for her information, but nothing happened. Grace said nothing. We waited and waited. Then one day Grace came home on leave. She looked so different. She wore smart clothes and brought gifts for all the family. But she said nothing about looking for her grandfather. We were all eating dinner when she went across to her grandmother and gave her a small parcel.

MOTHER: What is this granddaughter? What is this Grace. You have already given me a present. I do not need another one.

GRACE: It is for you, Grandmother. You made it.

MOTHER: I don't understand. You have just given me this gift. I did not make it. It came from Fiji.

GRACE: Open the parcel Grandmother. It is for you alone.

SFX: SOUND OF PAPER PARCEL BEING OPENED

MOTHER: This is strange, Grace. Oh, oh...oh...look everyone. It is his necklace. Oh...look. Here is the blue shell in the middle. It is my husband's necklace. He is alive, he's alive. Where is he Grace.... where is he Grace? He must come home. I want him home. I am so happy. This is the necklace I made for him. And the blue shell still looks beautiful. What did your grandfather say to you, Grace?

GRACE: He could say nothing, Grandma. He is dead. He has been dead for many years.

MOTHER: (sad) Oh... oh.....ahhhhh.....my husband, my husband.

GRACE: I had been looking for grandfather for a long time and a Fiji friend told me where to go. It was at a big sugar farm, near a town called Nadi. Grandfather had been taken there after he was captured by the white men of the big ship. There are still some Solomon Islanders there, but they are not the people who were captured by the white men. These are their sons and daughters.

MOTHER: How did you find out about my husband?

GRACE: I remembered the story about the necklace you made him. I told this story to a family and they went to their house and brought the necklace for me.

MOTHER: Were they friends of my husband?

GRACE: It happened a long time ago. When father was dying he asked his friends to take the necklace and send it back to his wife in Malaita. It stayed in Fiji because no-one had money. When I arrived and said I was his granddaughter, I was given the necklace to bring it back to you.

MOTHER: I am happy and so sad too. I know what happened to my husband. He always thought of me and the family. I am sad that he is dead.

Now – my children. I am going outside. I want to be alone. I want to sit by the sea and the trees and watch the shadows and think of my husband who lies far away buried in Fiji.

I will talk to my husband. He will be there waiting for me in the shadows.

SFX: SOUND OF WIND

You have been listening to “Shadows” a play about Solomon Islands that happened a long time ago.

The actors were.....