

Children of Poverty

A play for the 62nd European Competition by Tim Eriksson, Jelena Jost and Leonie Knaak

Characters:

Old Luke Evans

Young Luke Evans

Demba “Dean”

Linda Evans (Voice)

Interviewer

Banker

INTRODUCTION: The play is about a teenager and his perspective on poverty and it deals with the situation of many people who suffer from it. This is a play about reality. Nothing else, but the way it is and how it works.

(Two adult persons are sitting at a table; one of them seems to be a journalist, the other an older white man)

Interviewer: Good afternoon! How are you?

Older Luke: I’m fine, thank you.

Interviewer: All right, Mr Evans, let’s begin with our interview. Could you start with some information about yourself, please?

Older Luke: Of course. *(prepares himself a bit)*

My name is Luke Evans, I am 65 years old and this is my story. It’s a story about change and about the gap between poverty and wealth ...

I had never had any financial problems because I was born into a rich family. At first I would like to show you what I was like before those life-changing events happened.

(on the stage)

(a beggar in rags is sitting with his face hidden in his arms)

(a younger man enters the stage, he is clothed in expensive clothes, he walks in an arrogant and selfish way)

(the beggar lifts his face and speaks to the man)

Beggar: Spare change, Sir?

Luke: Excuse me?

Beggar: Do you have some money for me, Sir?

Luke: What?! *(Pause)* Are you kidding me? *(Laughing)*

Beggar: I am sorry, Sir.

Luke: Why should I give my money to a scum like you?! You don't even try to work and earn money. People like you are making me sick! If I was in your situation, I ...

(The beggar stands up, without any other reaction and walks away)

Luke: Ha ... What a jerk ...

Older Luke: It's easy to see that I didn't care much about others. Especially when the others were poor people. But later on exactly that day ...

(phone ringing, Luke answers the call, off-screen voice)

Linda Evans: Luke!

Luke: Mum? What's going on? Why are you so emotional?

Linda Evans: Something very bad happened. Your dad ... he... he... they came into our house ... and ... *(she is very nervous, it is hard to understand her; her voice is cracking)*

Luke: Who?! *(starts walking nervously on the stage)*

Mum: The police ... They took him with them. Something was said about financial fraud ...

(Luke's face turns white immediately; looks at the audience)

(Effects)

Older Luke: After my father got arrested for several financial frauds, my mother and I lost everything we had. Our house. The cars. The friends we were supposed to have. And every single coin. Everything was gone just after one week. So in the end I was left alone. From rags to riches. Just in the other way. I just had some Euros in my bag. And there I was. On the street. Without anything ... The house of cards in which I had been living collapsed.

(Luke is sitting on the pavement; seems to be hopeless)

Luke: Oh my God!

And what am I supposed to do now? Probably I need to find some work. Earn money and so on.

Dean: Dream on, boy. *(with a smile on his face; enters the stage from the off)*

Luke: Excuse me?

Dean: I said, “Dream on, boy”. Do you have any problems with ya ears?

Luke: Who are you that you can talk with me like that? *(stands up aggressively)*

Dean: Dean ... my name is Dean.

Luke: You are ... homeless I suppose. *(while eyeing him suspiciously)*

Dean: Oh, you are a fast one ... Yeah, people might call me homeless. But I have opportunities to have a shelter. What’s your name?

Luke: Luke ... May I ask you how long you are “homeless” or whatever you call that?

Dean: Well, let us say that I live in poverty. And I live in this situation since I was born. You need to know, that I wasn’t born here in this country, maybe you have already guessed so. I am from Kenya and my original name is Demba, but people here call me Dean.

Luke: Kenya? Well that’s far away, though. So you and your family are immigrants?

Dean: There is no family ... just me. I left Kenya when I was 10 years old and came to Germany as an illegal immigrant.

Luke: Oh, man. That’s a hard one, indeed.

Dean: What about you? You don’t look like you live in poverty.

Luke: Well, I have just turned homeless. My father ... eehm ... my family lost everything from one day to the next.

Dean: So welcome to my world, Mr Luke. *(shaking hands, pat on the back, laughing)*

Luke: Thank you. *(laughing)*

What do you do for living?

Dean: There are several social benefits I get. But often that’s not enough. I try to take every job offered to me. And sometimes, as hard as it is, I need to beg. But I have my guitar and I play on it to get a little money. So it’s not the usual begging.

Luke: Wow ... And do you think you need more social benefits?

Dean: You know, Luke, I was born in Kenya. Kenya is a very poor country. There are no social benefits for the people. And there is a lot of poverty.

There are many problems caused by this poverty: a lack of everyday resources, the people are hungry and thirsty, no good medical care, especially for the people in the countryside; no work, many people are farmers, which is a hard job in the dry Kenya.

The country needs money but it seems impossible to get it. And because of this big poverty, the people are very prone to radical religions and to propaganda.

Many Kenyans try to come to Europe earn more money. And then many Europeans criticise the refugees and don't want to have them in their country. It seems to be a hopeless situation for this country and its people.

I think in comparison to situations in other countries, especially in developing countries like Kenya, the social welfare system in Germany is quite good.

Luke: Well, I understand your point of view. But how do you see yourself in the future? I mean for example in 20 years?

Dean: That's the problem. I don't know. It's hard and maybe impossible to escape from our situation. Let us take "Hartz IV" for example. That's a good idea of course. We both live in a very fair country. You can just receive this social benefit if you try to find some work. But when I finally get a job, then I won't get the money from the state anymore. That sounds fair too. But for people like me, who didn't attend any educational institution, it's hard to find a well-paid job. If we find one, it is usually a minimum-wage job without any future.

Luke: Did you know that you have a very good knowledge? I mean it's something special without any form of education.

Dean: Well I learned all those things on my own. That's important if you live in such a situation; being active and moving on.

Luke: But if we focus on the problem you mentioned last ... What could be done to solve it?

Dean: Well, I'm no politician. And maybe that's the thing: I know politicians are confronted with the topic "poverty" everyday. But maybe that's not enough. They need to develop a sustainable solution for the future because, even here in Germany, the number of people living in poverty increases.

Luke: Sustainable solution?

Dean: I think that the new, the younger generation plays the biggest role: They need to have a better education; so the educational system has to be modernised. They need to have better social opportunities, like playing football or dancing; so our country needs to promote and support social clubs and organisations.

Luke: And I guess that you have many connections to teenagers who are in the same situation like you?

Dean: Yeah of course.

Luke: What can you tell me 'bout them? How do they handle their situations?

Dean: A child and a teenager should live with his family and should have a home. That's complicated because there are so many political refugees from Africa, just like me. A lot of the teenagers living in poverty have connections to criminality, alcohol and drugs. That's not good at all but for them it seems to be the best solution. And still there is a big hatred against the government.

Luke: Maybe you're right ... But I think that I need to look for a shelter this night. I hope we will meet again soon. Thank you for your wise words and your good advice. Have a nice evening!

Dean: You're welcome. Good night and good luck!

Older Luke: I was very fascinated by Dean. He didn't seem to be a lazy person who lives in poverty. He was full of activity and creativity. This guy knew exactly in which situation he was living. But a few weeks later, there was an event, which changed my point of view. Till this moment I had always got through with the little money I earned by working and which I get from social benefits. But after a time in which I didn't get a job ...

Luke: Excuse me Mister, would you be so kind and give me some money for something to eat?

Banker: No! Work for your money, you scum!

(pause)

Luke: Did you know that if I weren't poor, you weren't rich either?

(freeze; the two men are looking each other in the eyes)

Older Luke: From this day on, I knew I had to do something. I started my organisation with a few other people living in poverty. Our organisation tries to help poor people especially teenagers without any perspectives. We offer several social projects, such as a drama club, a football team and we arrange a dinner once a week. In the end I would like to say that I have recognised that helping people in need is much more fulfilling than just selfishly thinking of your own welfare.

Interviewer: Thank you for this valuable insight into your life and your touching story.

Older Luke: I hope that the people can learn something from the interview. Everybody can change a little bit.

(the men stand up, shake hands and walk off the stage)

The End.