

A SINGLE TREE

24-DE01-W02

The world of greed and oppression in 1930 Sierra Leone as seen through the eyes of the six year old daughter of a missionary.

FADE IN

EXT. KAMAKWIE VILLAGE, SIERRA LEONE, AFRICA - 1930

An adult female NARRATOR is heard in VOICE OVER as PATRICIA, a precocious six year old caucasian girl with uncombed hair, skinned knees, and wearing a dress, is climbing a tree with her eye on a bird's nest as she makes her way higher.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

There was a saying among the people in 1930 Sierra Leone that a single tree does not make a forest. That simple phrase represented a timeless truth: people need each other.

TENNEH - BELOW TREE

TENNEH, a native Sierra Leonian woman and Patricia's caretaker, stands below the tree looking up.

TENNEH

Come down, young lady. You're going too high.

CLOSE UP - PATRICIA

Patricia is inches away from the nest peering over the top.

PATRICIA

I'm okay. I just wanna look.

TENNEH

Well hurry up. Your papa's back from town.

PAUL

Patricia's father, PAUL, 28 years old, walks past carrying a small package. She scurries down the tree and begins racing after him.

NARRATOR

Father used to say if everyone was like the people of Sierra Leone, the world would be a much better place.

PATRICIA - ON GROUND

As she gets nearer to him...

PATRICIA
Betcha can't catch me!

PAUL AND PATRICIA

Hearing her voice from behind, he sets the package down and spins around as she leaps into his arms. He catches her and with his arms wrapped around her twirls around as they laugh.

PAUL
Looks like I win the bet again.

PATRICIA
Did you miss me?

PAUL
Sure did. The whole thirty minutes
I was gone.

He sets her down and picks up the package.

PAUL
This came from the States.

PATRICIA
(excited)
From Grandma? Open it! Open it!

He opens it, pulls out an envelope putting it in his pocket.

PAUL
We'll read that later. Looks like
there's something else in here.
(speaks slowly, building
anticipation)
What could this be?

He slowly pulls out a package of penny candy.

PATRICIA
(jumping up and down)
Can I have a piece, can I...?

PAUL
Only one.

Patricia pouts to show her disapproval as she puts a piece in her mouth. Paul kneels down in front of her. Tenneh watches.

PAUL
 (playfully)
 ...I've got some "very
 important" ...
 (scrunches up his face)
 ...business to attend to.

She scrunches up her face and mimics him.

PATRICIA
 "Very important?"

PAUL
 That's right. So, why don't you and
 Tenneh go lasso a hippopotamus for
 me while I go inside?

PATRICIA
 You always say that.

PAUL
 I do, don't I?

PATRICIA
 (pouting)
 Yes! It means go play because you
 have....

She suddenly brightens, scrunches up her face and attempts to tickle his ribs.

PATRICIA
 (giggling)
 ..."very important" business!

He tickles her instead, she squeals and wiggles out of his arms and runs away laughing. Paul walks to the mission house.

NARRATOR
 Of course, to me, the little
 village of Kamakwie was the whole
 world. A world of people so bound
 by compassion that nothing could
 come between them. But 1930
 threatened to change all that.

PATRICIA

An Egyptian toad hops across the path in front of Patricia.
 Being curious, she follows as it continues hopping away.

Once it comes to rest, she squats down to look at it more closely but her attention is averted when she overhears SULAIMAN, a dour faced local villager, CALL OUT to Paul O.S. as he's about to enter the mission house.

SULAIMAN

Reverend!

SULAIMAN AND PAUL

Paul stops in the doorway and turns.

PAUL

Brother Sulaiman!

Sees the basket in Sulaiman's hands.

PAUL

What've you got?

SULAIMAN

More eggs for you and the Princess.

He hands the basket of eggs to Paul. Patricia runs to her father's side, clings to his leg.

SULAIMAN

How's the princess today?

She shrugs, smiles shyly.

PAUL

What's the latest scuttlebutt?

SULAIMAN

(with anxiety)

The people. They're acting foolishly.

PAUL

I heard rumors of that.

SULAIMAN

People are leaving their jobs and their families to go to Kona.

PAUL

(surprised)

What's in Kona?

SULAIMAN

Diamonds. Only one, actually, but there's talk of more.

PAUL
 (shakes head)
 People get worked up over the
 slightest gossip. I'm sure it'll
 pass.

SULAIMAN
 I don't think so, Reverend.

PAUL
 (casually, flippantly)
 Well, there's not much you or I can
 do about it. Just don't let gold
fever get a hold of you.

SULAIMAN
 And act foolishly? No, sir!

Sulaiman turns to leave.

PAUL
 My regards to Mariatu.

SULAIMAN
 Blessings to you. And you,
 Princess.

Patricia shyly smiles.

INT. MISSION HOUSE - DAY

Paul and Patricia enter the mission house. She climbs onto a
 straight-back chair and sits on her knees facing backwards
 with her chin resting on the back of the chair. She watches
 as her father places the eggs on the counter.

PATRICIA
 Doesn't Mr. Silly Man like eggs?

PAUL
 I'm sure he likes them just fine.

PATRICIA
 Then why does he give them away?

PAUL
 He's showing his gratitude for
 helping him with his palm oil
 harvest. Doesn't have any money, so
 he gives what he can.

She watches as he leaves the room. He returns with a toolbox.

PATRICIA
Can I have another piece?

PAUL
After dinner.

He sets the toolbox on the table, grabs a pair of work gloves from a shelf, then ruffles her hair.

PATRICIA
Can I show you my bird nest?

PAUL
Maybe later. Don't forget about my hippopotamus.

She climbs out of the chair and ambles away.

PATRICIA
I know, I know. You have "very important business"....

PAUL
That's right. The business of...more tickling!

He lunges toward her, she screams and runs out the door laughing.

EXT. KAMAKWIE VILLAGE - DAY

Paul and his missionary friend SAMUEL are talking while working on the construction of a small home in the village.

PAUL
Do you think it'll amount to anything?

SAMUEL
Most likely. But it'll be a question of ownership.

PAUL
Isn't the Kona District on public land?

SAMUEL
Land controlled by the Protectorate.

PAUL
So, London will oversee the mining process, is that it?

SAMUEL
Oversee? You mean overtake.

Samuel lowers his hammer to his side, faces Paul.

SAMUEL
Have you ever seen greed in action?
The mention of high-stake minerals
causes people to act in
unimaginable ways. We saw it in
Nigeria.

PAUL
Let's take a drive up to Kona later
and have a look.

EXT. KONA DISTRICT - DAY

Paul and Samuel stand beside Samuel's 1928 Ford Model T pickup on a hillside overlooking one of the mining sites where dozens of Sierra Leonians, many of them children, are busy digging, sifting, and working frantically.

PAUL
Those are children!

SAMUEL
Cheaper labor than their parents.

The workers appear exhausted although their pace never slows. They are all up to their knees and thighs in muddy water as they scoop up shovelfuls of rocks and mud. A boy drinks from the muddy filth.

SAMUEL
The Protectorate will never give up
the right to mine Sierra Leone's
resources. Their geologists have
been traveling here since '23
testing and analyzing core samples.

PAUL
Couldn't the wealth from this
discovery end poverty for the
Sierra Leonians?

SAMUEL
It could. But it won't. They'll
continue this pace working for
pennies while the fat cats in
London get fatter.

Paul, repulsed and speechless, turns away.

SAMUEL

Truth is, they'll never lay eyes on it.

INT. MISSION HOME - NIGHT

Paul and Patricia are seated at the kitchen table having dinner. She notices that her father is not smiling and appears distracted. She hops down from her chair, walks to her father and grabs his cheeks forcing a smile on his face.

PATRICIA

That's better. Just stay like that

Paul chuckles and pulls her close and squeezes her.

PAUL

You always know how to make me smile.

PATRICIA

It's easy. Why doesn't Mr. Silly Man smile?

PAUL

He's worried. For good reason.

PATRICIA

Why do you call him Silly Man when he never smiles?

PAUL

It's Sulaiman. Some people just don't.

He picks her up and sits her on the table top.

PAUL

I know you don't understand, but people are quite disturbed right now. I'll need to be spending more time with them helping folks like Sulaiman keep their faith in God.

PATRICIA

And then he'll smile.

PAUL

I hope so. I just hope I'm up to the task.

PATRICIA

Will it be hard?

PAUL
Very hard, Chipmunk.

PATRICIA
Like catching a hippopotamus?

EXT. KAMAKWIE VILLAGE - DAY

The narration continues as Paul is seen on a ladder hammering siding onto the village home. Patricia is "helping" and Samuel is on the roof laying shingles.

NARRATOR
Father's work became even more difficult as news spread of the valuable resources in the fields of Sierra Leone. Farmers abandoned their fields to work in the mines causing market prices to soar, foreigners smuggled diamonds across the border, and the simple life of Sierra Leonians transitioned into a life of hardship and struggle. What Father didn't know was that this was only the beginning.

Paul hears a commotion that grabs his attention. A woman, MARIATU, is frantically crying and screaming. People around her are attempting to console her. Paul lays the saw down.

PAUL
(sternly)
Patricia, stay here!

Paul quickly walks toward the woman. Samuel leaps off the roof and runs to join him.

PAUL
Mariatu! What...?

MARIATU
(crying, screaming)
They killed him! They killed him!

PAUL
(shocked)
Sulaiman?

She grabs onto him clutching him as she wails and sobs against his chest. He holds her consolingly. Patricia, in spite of her father's orders, draws near and takes it all in.

PAUL
 (compassionately)
 Tell me what happened.

MARIATU
 He... he went to the mine fields. I
 told him not to go.

SAMUEL
 Was there an accident?

MARIATU
 They say he stole diamonds. I don't
 believe that.

PAUL
 (distraught)
 I don't believe it either.

SAMUEL
 This is only going to get worse,
 Paul. The Protectorate can steal
 from the people, but God help those
 who steal from them!

EXT. KONA DISTRICT - DAY

Paul attempts reasoning with 50 year old Bailey, the
 overweight representative from London dressed in an expensive
 suit and displaying an arrogant attitude. Bailey stands next
 to his 1930 Bentley near the mining site. Patricia stands by
 her father. Paul is firm demonstrating his anger.

PAUL
 The minerals rightly belong to the
 people of Sierra Leone.

BAILEY
 Wise up, Reverend. These people
 can't manage production of this
 scale. Their efforts would be
 hilariously disastrous.

PAUL
 Then help them, teach them, but
 don't just come in and strip them
 of the one opportunity they have to
 pull themselves out of poverty.

BAILEY
 They got themselves into the mess
 they're in. And they'll be paid for
 their labor.

(MORE)

BAILEY (CONT'D)

Thousands of jobs will be created
and for that they ought to be
grateful.

PAUL

Paid a pittance to put wealth into
who's pocket?

BAILEY

(impatient)

It all belongs to the Crown,
Reverend. And in case you don't
know your history, England
established this colony as a
sanctuary for emancipated slaves.
Out of compassion we gave them a
home at the Crown's expense, funded
the building of their cities. We
gave them their freedom.

PAUL

Honorable. Yet now you've subjected
an entire nation to an existence of
slavery and bondage!

Paul starts to walk away holding Patricia's hand.

BAILEY

(with contempt)

Reverend! Don't entertain the
thought of fighting this! You'll
regret that decision!

Patricia looks back over her shoulder at Bailey, then up at
her father. They stop at the top of the hill overlooking the
mine in the distance as the Bentley carrying Bailey drives
away stirring up a trail of dust in its wake.

Paul sits down on a fallen tree with his elbows on his knees.

PAUL

(quietly to himself)

Fight? You better believe I'm going
to fight!

Patricia kneels down examining bugs crawling on the ground.
She looks up at her father and sees him sitting with his eyes
closed, walks to him and lifts one of his eye lids.

PATRICIA

There you are!

Paul smiles, motions for her to sit beside him. He stares in
the direction of the mining site.

PAUL
(softly, reflective)
God has been so good to us, Patty.
I'd almost forgotten.

She nestles up against him. He has tears in his eyes.

PAUL
Guard your heart, Little One. Be
careful what you put in it.

As the narration resumes father and daughter continue looking out across the valley.

NARRATOR
As we sat on that hill looking across the valley we saw a single tree in the midst of the devastation. Father told me it would never survive without a forest, that the next heavy rain would wash it away. I didn't understand that he was talking about the people of Sierra Leone. He knew they would need to stand together to survive, and stand together they would. Even though it led to their own poverty.

PAUL
Let's go home, young lady. We've got a lot of work to do.

PATRICIA
Important work?

PAUL
Very important work.

PATRICIA
Can I help?

PAUL
Sure. But first, let's go catch that hippopotamus.

He stands and lifts her into his arms. She rests her head on his shoulder as they walk away from the CAMERA.

FADE OUT.

THE END

