

TITLE - LOVE IN THE SPACE OF TIME

TITLE - UGANDA, 1972

101 EXT. BUNGALOW WITH PALM THATCH ROOF AND VERANDA, MID MORNING

PANORAMA of colourful tropical garden, with sweeping lawn and acacia trees. Leads down to LAKE VICTORIA with dense PAPYRUS. Background sound of cicadas and lakeside birds.

ZOOM to VERANDA.

SALEENA (Indian girl, 18, attractive, long black hair, wearing casual shorts and T-shirt). Reclines in easy chair. Gazes over garden towards the LAKE. BOOK lies open on her lap.

SALEENA (V.O.)

I was seven when I informed my parents I would become a doctor. When I reminded them years later they'd clearly forgotten.

CLOSE-UP, SALEENA'S wistful smile.

FATHER (O.S.)

But you'd have to go to university.

MOTHER (O.S.)

No one in our family has ever done that.

FATHER & MOTHER (O.S.)

We couldn't possibly afford the fees.

SALEENA (O.S.)

I'll get a scholarship, then.

CAMERA returns to SALEENA gazing over the garden.

NATHAN (gardener) pushes a hand-mower in background.

SALEENA (V.O.)

Now, I was wondering if my childhood dream would be exposed for what it was: childish fantasy.

CAT, trying to conceal itself behind a tree, eyes two HOOPOES probing the lawn.

SALEENA (V.O. CONT'D)

I've been offered a place, done the revision, taken the exams. Now, all I can do is wait: wait, worry and wonder if I'll achieve my ambition.

CAT makes a half-hearted rush at the HOOPOES. They fly up and settle on another part of the lawn. The CAT sits down and licks a paw. SALEENA smiles at its feigned indifference. She waves to NATHAN (30-ish, wearing shorts and Wellington boots, sweat glistening on his body) pushing hand-mower with a long handle and cross-piece.

NATHAN stops to wave and grin, then resumes his mowing.

CAMERA follows scenes as SALEENA talks about the garden.

SALEENA (V.O.)

The beautiful garden is mainly lawn; it starts at the front of the house, spreads round the sides and flows down to the lake where it merges with papyrus: a solid wall of green, broken only by the tunnels which hippos use when they come out at night.

CAMERA focuses on PAPYRUS and HIPPO TUNNELS.

SALEENA (V.O. CONT'D)

I like to think of them frolicking on the lawn in the moonlight, but they probably just snuffle around for any grass that Nathan misses.

FADE IN background piano music (Beethoven's, Für Elise).

SALEENA (V.O. CONT'D)

(smiles as she listens)

My sister's always playing or singing. She plays beautifully and with such confidence. And she has a lovely voice.

My musical repertoire's limited to simple tunes on the recorder, but I love listening to classical music.

MUSIC abruptly stops.

MOTHER calls from inside house.

MOTHER (O.S.)

Saleena, it's come! It's here!

MOTHER (Indian, 40s, wearing sari) comes onto veranda waving a letter. SISTER (15 y.o. also in shorts and T-shirt) follows. EZEKIEL (African cook, 60s) comes out of the kitchen drying hands on apron).

SALEENA takes letter.

MOTHER

See the stamp!

SALEENA (V.O.)

(inspects stamp)

It has to be the letter; no one else would write to me from Kenya.

SISTER

Open it, Saleena.

MOTHER

Go on.

EZEKIEL nods encouragement.

NATHAN stops mowing to watch.

SALEENA, fearing failure, struggles to open letter with clumsy fingers and tense expression. She sees too little writing.

SALEENA

(whispers)

I've passed.

SCENE FADES to close-up of SALEENA'S book on the table: collection of POEMS by EMILY DICKINSON.

102 INT. SALEENA'S BEDROOM AND HOUSE, NIGHT-TIME

SALEENA, in pyjamas, tossing and turning in bed under mosquito net. Faint illumination from external security light.

SALEENA

(whispering)

I've passed. I'm going to medical school. I'm going to be a doctor.

MORE tossing and turning.

SALEENA (CONT'D)

I'm going to be a doctor. I'm going to be a doctor. Go to sleep. I'm going to..

Falls asleep.

LOUD BANGING.

CLOSE-UP of bedside clock shows 2.00 a.m.

SALEENA - grumbling

Not that wretched hippo again, trying to get into the garage. Go away!

Pulls PILLOW over her head.

BANGING becomes louder and more persistent.

UNCLE (O.S.)
(urgent)

Saleena, Saleena.

SHE sits up trying to orientate.

UNCLE (O.S. CONT'D)
Saleena, wake up!

SALEENA (V.O.)
My uncle. What does he want at this time of night?

SALEENA pushes mosquito net aside and goes to window.
UNCLE in dressing gown is still hammering on window. His car is in the driveway. AUNT in passenger's seat, tears glistening on cheeks in the glow from security light on corner of house.

UNCLE
(urgent and fearful)
You must be leaving; the soldiers are coming.

SALEENA whimpers and runs through to her parents' room.

SALEENA
(voice cracking)
The soldiers are coming!

FATHER panics and struggles with dressing gown.

FATHER
Oh, my God! Oh, my God!

MOTHER whimpers as she rushes off to wake the SISTER

MOTHER
Oh no! Please no.

FATHER drags suitcases out of hall cupboard, still muttering.
SALEENA runs and unlocks front door. UNCLE bursts into house.

UNCLE
(in panic)
There's no time for packing. Just come!

FATHER
But we must be taking some clothes!

UNCLE
No, see! Already they are at Manjit's house.

UNCLE points out of open door as flames erupt from the thatch

on the roof of a nearby house.

UNCLE (CONT'D)

Hurry! Leave everything. Just come.

EVERYONE rushes outside.

103 EXT. OUTSIDE THE HOUSE, NIGHT-TIME. FAINT GLOW FROM FIRE

FATHER runs to the back of the house.

SALEENA, MOTHER and SISTER wait fearfully in nightclothes, faces streaked with tears. Cling to each other, clutching few small bags.

EZEKIEL and wife arrive from the servants' quarters looking fearful.

MOTHER

Ezekiel, we have to leave.

BACKGROUND SOUNDS - revving car engine, tyres spinning on gravel.

Elderly Morris CAR races round side of house and skids to halt. FATHER jumps out of driving seat. Dressing gown snags and tears of door catch

FATHER

Hurry, hurry!

FATHER throws bags into car and bundles MOTHER and SISTER into back seat. SALEENA jumps into front.

FATHER

We'll be back, Ezekiel.

EZEKIEL

(bewildered)

Yes, *bwana*.

FATHER

Look after yourselves.

FATHER runs round to driver's side, leaves a slipper on the drive. Slams the door, crashes the gears and speeds after the UNCLE'S car which is already out of sight.

SALEENA glances back at EZEKIEL and his WIFE huddled together, faces faintly lit by glow of FLAMES from nearby house.

EZEKIEL picks up the slipper.

An OWL flies off as shadowy figures burst from the bushes.

SALEENA is horrified to see EZEKIEL and his wife being

attacked by a mob with machetes.

104. INT. CAR. NIGHT-TIME.

FATHER turns onto the main road.

SALEENA loses sight of the horror.

FATHER drives through the night. No sign of UNCLE'S car.

SALEENA (V.O.)

Those two gentle people what have they done to deserve that? They've been with our family since my father was a child - their only transgression, forty years devoted service to an Asian family. Then that madman Idi Amin seizes power and decides to expel us Asians. So much suffering, so much brutality, so much killing. I later learned that, by next morning, our beautiful house at Jinja overlooking the source of the Nile, was no more than a smouldering ruin. We drove all that night and reached the Kenyan border as it was getting light.

BORDER POST comes into view as dawn is breaking.

FATHER is cleared to enter KENYA, but waits for the UNCLE'S car.

SALEENA (V.O. CONT'D)

My Father waited for over four hours but no sign of my uncle and aunt. It wasn't until years later I learned what happened to them. Finally my father was forced to drive on. And so, with little more than the clothes I was wearing and a place at Nairobi's Medical School, I arrived in Kenya, my mind full of fear, my heart full of hope.

CLOSE-UP of poem in EMILY DICKINSON book, title: "Hope is the thing with feathers."

SALEENA (V.O. CONT'D)

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul
And sings the tune without the words
And never stops - at all.

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard
And sore must be the storm
That could abash...

FADES OUT

TITLE - CAMBRIDGE, ENGLAND 1975

201 INT. OFFICE IN THE UNIVERSITY BOTANY DEPARTMENT, MORNING

DAVID (British student, fit-looking 24, wearing safari boots, jeans and T-shirt) arrives outside the office, knocks on door.

LIONEL (O.S.)

Come in.

DAVID enters to see PROFESSOR LIONEL HANLEY (British, bronzed and wiry, late 50s) standing on a chair his back to the door, fiddling with a picture on the wall. DAVID notices the Professor's baggy khaki shorts, long socks and safari boots.

DAVID

Professor, it's David Seymour, I've come-

LIONEL

(tetchy)

I know who you are. Tell me, is that straight?

DAVID

Sorry.

LIONEL

The picture: is it straight?

DAVID

Oh, er, yes.

LIONEL indicates adjacent picture

LIONEL

And this one?

DAVID

Yes. Looks fine.

LIONEL jumps down and shakes DAVID'S hand.

LIONEL

David, splendid, grand.

He turns back and gazes through half-closed eyes at VAN GOGH'S two paintings of chairs.

LIONEL

I must say they do look rather good. You know the

artist, I presume.

DAVID

Van Gogh?

LIONEL

It is indeed. Sit down, David. Sit down.

LIONEL sits in his chair and studies DAVID, who is unnerved by the shrewd eyes and bronzed kneecaps.

LIONEL (CONT'D)

The pictures, David: tell me what you see.

DAVID gazes in bewilderment at the pictures.

DAVID

Er, um... Two chairs.

LIONEL

Ye-e-s. Would you, er... care to develop that theme?

DAVID (V.O.)

Where is all this leading? Better humour the guy, I suppose.

DAVID (ALOUD)

Well, the one on the left is quite simple, mainly in yellow and with a pipe on the seat, but the other is more ornate with richer colours and—

LIONEL

(holds up hand)

Stop there! Now shut your eyes and continue.

DAVID (V.O.)

I sighed - not audibly - and couldn't help wondering what all this had to do with my application to study for a PhD in plant ecology.

DAVID (ALOUD)

(eyes shut)

Well, I could say that the yellow chair is simple and functional. Whereas the ornate chair on the right speaks more of comfort and warm evenings in front of the fire with a good book and—

LIONEL

(interrupts)

Excellent! By shutting your eyes, David, you've evoked an image which goes far beyond the simple

portrayal of a chair. Go on.

DAVID

(opens and closes eyes)

Well... I can perhaps imagine the warmth of the fire,
and um... possibly envisage the book I might be
reading and... and even the cold beer at my elbow.

LIONEL

Splendid! Do you see what I'm getting at?

DAVID (V.O.)

I hoped my vacuous smile implied concurrence rather
than bemusement.

LIONEL

Although the pictures are now in different art
galleries, Van Gogh intended them to be displayed
together facing each other - as I've done with the
prints: Van Gogh's own chair on the left and his
friend Paul Gauguin's on the right - each
representing what Van Gogh perceived as the
respective and different personalities of the two
artists.

Pauses to massage his kneecaps.

LIONEL (CONT'D)

You're familiar with the work of Roger Sperry, I
presume?

DAVID

(wincing)

Afraid not.

LIONEL

Come, come: the so-called lateralisation of brain
function.

DAVID

(hesitant)

Er... Is it the right side of the brain controlling
the left side of the body and the left brain
controlling the right?

LIONEL

In simple terms, yes. On his way to a Nobel Prize, I
shouldn't wonder. Less well known, though, is that
the two hemispheres of the brain process information
differently. Are you with me?

DAVID nods, still uncertain.

LIONEL (CONT'D)

The left side is verbal, logical and analytical, and the right side perceptual, intuitive and holistic; an analogy admirably portrayed by van Gogh. That's why I've hung the pictures that way.

LIONEL continues to gaze at them, seemingly lost in thought.

LIONEL (CONT'D)

By the way, David, the topic I'd like you to research is communication between trees.

DAVID

Sorry?

LIONEL

Trees are living organisms, like us. Well, not quite like us - they don't have a central nervous system for a start - but you get the idea. So, how do they communicate?

DAVID

Um. Not sure I quite..

LIONEL

(points out of window)

The concept is simple. If that tree over there is infested with caterpillars, do the neighbouring trees know and, if so, do they become repellent to the caterpillars or fungus, or whatever it is, attacking the first tree? That certainly seems to be the case with some tree species. How do they do it? When you've sorted that out, you can go and study acacias and giraffes.

DAVID

In Africa?

LIONEL

Where else? Cambridgeshire, sadly, is not noted for its acacias - or its giraffes for that matter. I'll find you funds from somewhere.

DAVID (V.O.)

Thanks seem to be the order of the day.

DAVID (ALoud)

Thanks.