

All God's Children

FADE IN:

EXT. CONGOLESE RESIDENTIAL CLUSTER - DAY

Wet ground with puddles of muddy water. Grassy patches are sprinkled under the gray sky. A fog hangs over the landscape.

SUPER: CITY OF KIKWIT, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO.

Homes are constructed close together, made from thatched grass and mud. A few have plastic tarps tied over the top.

Squatting in a doorway is NEVA (36), her eyes as black as night, with a white scar that runs along her bare shoulder.

Neva wears a blue fabric head wrap and a matching dress.

Nearby ARCEL (18 months), plays.

Neva approaches him and covers her face with her hands.

Arcel hesitates. Neva pulls her hands away to reveal her face and Arcel lights up in a grin.

A military truck RUMBLES along the road, kicking up dust.

Neva tracks the vehicle with her eyes. The truck accelerates, ROARING past the grouping of huts.

Arcel pulls a yellow flower from a clump of grass. He points it at a goat and heads for the animal.

Neva whisks her son into her arms and kisses him.

NEVA
(in Swahili)
Look at the sky, Arcel. Your
flower will be the sun.

INT. NEVA'S HOME - NIGHT

The floor of Neva's house is earth. Rain accosts the structure, a thousand THWACKS at a time.

Neva and Arcel lie on a yellow padded blanket. A small opening in the wall serves as a window.

A man's shirt is folded neatly over the home's only chair. Neva looks longingly at it.

A GUNSHOT rings out.

Neva peeks outside, but with the rain there is no visibility.

Arcel begins to CRY.

Neva runs her fingertips over Arcel's cheeks, wiping the tears. She touches a cowlick in his hair and smiles.

She sings to him in Swahili.

NEVA

The dancing owl waves his tail
feathers. I'm the owl. I now tell
you by my dancing, I'm the owl. I'm
the owl.

ARCEL

More. More Mama.

INT. KIKWIT ORPHANGE - NIGHT

The ceiling drips rain through grass slats. The sound of rain BEATING down on the structure.

The building is one room: a holding area separated by a wooden partition and a makeshift office with a desk, papers scattered over it.

SEVEN CHILDREN are crammed into the holding area.

A Congolese man, RUFUN (39), sits the desk smoking and listening to RAP on a radio. He is thin and a chunk of his upper lip is missing.

Rufun's feet are up on the desk, revealing a knife protruding from one boot.

Some children WHIMPER, some stare into space.

One boy sucks on his hand, a gaping wound around his eye has bubbled up with infection.

The door BURSTS open, and TWO SOLDIERS wearing brown 'Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda' uniforms storm in.

They are drenched and carry AK-47s. They speak French.

SOLDIER #1

How many at this orphanage?

RUFUN

Less than ten, and they are not in
good health. I am but a go between
and if I don't deliver -

SOLDIER # 2
Shut up!

SOLDIER #1
We need boys.

RUFUN
I only have two.

Rufun unlocks the holding pin and enters.

RUFUN
Here.

He grabs TWO BOYS and pushes them at the soldiers.

SOLDIER #1
Not enough.

SOLDIER #2
That one. And that one.

He points his gun at GIRLS.

The soldier takes one of the girls by the throat and whispers in her ear. She accompanies the soldier without resistance.

SOLDIER #1
That one too.

He motions to A GIRL WITH BRAIDS. She wears a bracelet of cheap red beads.

RUFUN
I can't give you that one. I have
a deal in place with some
Americans. It will bring money.
I'll share with you.

The soldier motions for the girl to exit. She doesn't move. He grabs her by the arm and squeezes until she CRIES OUT.

He points towards the door with the gun.

SOLDIER #1
Let's go.

She gives him a stoney look, not budging.

The soldier SHOTS her in the stomach. She hits the partition with a THUD, and SLUMPS to the floor.

The soldier opens the door and shoves the children into the rain.

The girl with the braids and red bracelet lies facing the ceiling. Her eyelids flicker as she slips into death.

INT. BOEING 737 AIRPLANE - NIGHT

A photograph of the girl with the braids and red bracelet is clutched in the hand of LISA POWELL (37), as the airplane cabin SHAKES and JOLTS.

Lisa's white skin is pale and sweaty, blond hair pulled tightly into a ponytail. She pulls her seat belt tighter across her khakis.

Next to Lisa sits JOHN POWELL (41), African American with glasses and matching khakis. He takes her hand and strokes his finger over the face of the girl in the photograph.

JOHN

Almost there. We'll finally get to hold her in person.

Lisa nods. She gets out a paper bag with a 'New York's Finest Bagels' sticker on it. She chews on a piece of bagel.

They look at the photo of the girl.

EXT. NEVA'S HOUSE - DAY

Through fog, the sun shines across the four corners of the sky.

Neva packs pieces of blue fabric into a satchel. Arcel digs in the dirt with a stick.

NEVA

(in Swahili)

Arcel. We go to market.

EXT. KIKWIT ROAD - DAY

Neva walks, the goat follows behind tied to a rope.

She carries Arcel in a fabric sling that stretches from her neck down across her stomach.

EXT. KIKWIT MARKETPLACE - DAY

Wicker baskets overflow with leafy greens. Rice is piled on blankets. Makeshift tables are set, created by overturned plastic bins.

MERCHANTS display their wares: Wooden statues, fruit, nuts in baskets and carved masks.

TOWNSPEOPLE crowd the market, bartering, smoking, talking and laughing.

Neva stops at a large stand with a plastic covering. It bares the 'RED CROSS' symbol.

Organizing supplies inside is AMY (23), American, in jean shorts and tank top. Long braids come down from a red bandana, and she greets Neva in French.

AMY

Neva, good morning.

NEVA

Morning, my friend.

Amy picks up Arcel. She coos at the child.

Neva unpacks her fabric onto a table. She ties the goat to one of the posts.

LATER

The sun is high in the sky. Arcel plays inside the stand. Amy and Neva sit next to the opening.

AMY

Hungry for food. Try in English.

NEVA

(in English)

Hungry, for, food.

AMY

Good.

A worn Congolese woman, ELODIE (33), in a red head wrap and matching dress approaches, casting a contrary eye at Neva.

Their exchange is in French.

NEVA

Greetings, Elodie.

ELODIE

I have no use for your greetings.
You have a goat for milk and fabric
to sew, but God cursed you too.

NEVA

Elodie, put away your anger.

Elodie looks down her nose at Neva, and walks off. Amy and Neva speak in French.

AMY
Your husbands, both killed?

NEVA
The Lord's Resistance Army.

AMY
I'm sorry.

NEVA
We have all lost. Some of us more than others. She is angry, her child is gone too. When you lose everything, it changes your heart in a way that cannot be repaired.

AMY
Heart. In English.

NEVA
(in English)
Heart.

Neva looks around. Arcel is gone.

NEVA
Arcel?

She stands, looking out into the market.

Ten yards away, Arcel chases a goat. Neva scoops him up.

INT. KIKWIT ORPHANGE - DAY

The girl with the red bracelet lies face up, face ashen and pale. Blood has accumulated around her torso and dried in the heat. Flies BUZZ around her.

The remaining children stand clear of her body.

Rufun covers his nose before taking a closer look at her.

LEONCE (41), Congolese, paces the room. His suit is soaked in sweat. He wears a silver watch, and his slightly long fingernails complete a smarmy look.

They speak in Swahili.

LEONCE
You chop! You could not stop them?

RUFUN

They had guns. Furnish me with guns and men, then maybe I stop them.

LEONCE

We meet the Americans in Kinshasa in five hours.

RUFUN

Give them one of the others.

LEONCE

They bring 30 thousand American dollars. They want a two year old girl.

RUFUN

I can travel North where I have some contacts, but it will take time.

LEONCE

No.

Leonce inspects the girl's corpse in disgust.

LEONCE

Get her out of here. We will get a replacement.

EXT. KIKWIT MARKETPLACE - DAY

A grey parrot SQUAWKS. The marketplace is packed under the mid-day sun.

VOICES and DRUMS mingle with the BAAING of goats and MUSIC that blares from a boom box.

At her stand, Neva chats with a RESIDENT, who mulls over fabric. Elodie sells wooden objects nearby.

Amy touches Neva on the shoulder.

AMY

(in French)

I'm going for water. I'll give Arcel lunch when I return.

Amy walks to a water pump several yards away.

At the edge of the market, a brown 1988 BMW-M5 with most of its paint rusted off, pulls up.

Neva puts different colored fabrics against the resident's face, nodding.

A goat wanders by, and Arcel takes notice. He follows the animal out of the stand and into the marketplace center.

The BMW idles with the door open.

Leonce and Rufun scan the crowd. Rufun eyes a WOMAN WITH A BABY. Leonce points to several GIRLS that stand together.

RUFUN
(in Swahili)
Too old.

Rufun sees Arcel. He jabs Leonce and points.

RUFUN
(in Swahili)
A boy?

LEONCE
(in Swahili)
He is the right age. Still looks
like a baby.

At Neva's stand, the resident fumbles in a purse for coins.

Neva looks for Arcel. He is gone. She scans over the gathering of goats.

Rufun approaches Arcel, who vigorously pets a goat.

Rufun takes a make-shift ball made of plastic bags bound by twine and places it on the ground, and waves at the boy. He points to the ball.

Neva motions for the customer to hold on.

NEVA
(in Swahili)
Wait. Wait.

Neva flits between stands.

NEVA
Arcel!

A SCREAM from Arcel is answered with a parrot SQUAWKS, adding confusion to the origin of the noise.

Neva whips about, trying to locate the boy.

NEVA

Arcel!

Elodie sees Leonce and Rufun running.

Arcel's legs kick as Leonce runs awkwardly, holding the squirming child. Arcel SCREAMS.

EXT. KINSHASA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

SCREECHING of airplane tires as the 737 lands on the dirt tarmac.

The doors open and TRAVELERS disembark, including John and Lisa. They walk towards the ramshackle airport.

LISA

Let's go meet our daughter.

EXT. KIKWIT MARKETPLACE - DAY

Neva is frantic, running rapidly between the stands. Amy searches the outskirts of the market.

NEVA

Arcel!

A flash of yellow catches her eye. A goat blocks her path and she pushes it out of the way.

In the dirt is a yellow flower, picked and then dropped.

NEVA

Arcel!

Neva turns to Elodie.

NEVA

(in French)

Did you see him?

Elodie hesitates.

ELODIE

(in French)

No.

Neva runs to the main road. She sees a BMW speeding towards Kinshasa.

INT. 1988 BMW-M5 - DAY

The odometer touches over 110 kph on the bumpy road as Leonce drives. In the backseat, Arcel pounds on the window, SCREAMING.

Rufun puts his hands over his ears.

RUFUN
(in Swahili)
Shut up!

Rufun raises his fist. Leonce grabs his arm.

LEONCE
(in Swahili)
We are almost there. Don't leave
bruises.

Rufun HITS Arcel. Silence.

EXT. KIKWIT MARKETPLACE - DAY

In the middle of the market, Neva has a crowd around her.

NEVA
(in Swahili)
Help me! Someone has taken him! I
saw their car, they drives towards
Kinshasa!

Elodie averts her eyes. Some of the merchants look for Arcel.

Neva gives a GUTTURAL WAIL that causes onlookers to cry or turn away.

NEVA
(in Swahili)
Will no one help me?

She looks around, and then to the main road. Neva runs towards the main road.

AMY
Neva!

EXT. KIKWIT LANDSCAPE - DAY

Miles of road stretch out from Kikwit towards Kinshasa. It is a deserted, desolate land with unfriendly terrain.

INT. TAXI - DAY

In the backseat, Lisa and John JOSTLE up and down on the bumpy road.

A TAXI DRIVER eyes the fair skin passenger in his rear view mirror.

TAXI DRIVER
You want to go to shopping?

JOHN
Just the hotel, thank you.

SUPER: CITY OF KINSHASA

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Lisa and John approach the DESK CLERK (21), who wears large gold earrings.

LISA
We're supposed to be meeting someone here. A lawyer, Leonce. Has he checked in?

DESK CLERK
Room 73.

They walk down

THE HALLWAY

in which everything has a dingy feel, that a new coat of paint can't hide. John and Lisa reach room 73.

LISA
Wait.

She embraces him.

LISA
Thank you.

John knocks and Leonce opens the door.

LEONCE
Mr. and Mrs. Powell, greetings. Come in.

They enter

ROOM 73

that has an all brown motif. A single bed and small TV are in the center.

Leonce stands in front of the bed, blocking a view of Arcel.

LEONCE
I trust your travel went well.

LISA
It was fine.

JOHN
This place, doesn't exactly look like the pictures.

Rufun exits from the bathroom, dropping a bottle of liquid into the garbage can.

LEONCE
This is Rufun, executive director of Angels of Love. He helps to organize the adoption. He runs the orphanage.

Lisa sees a pair of tiny brown legs on the bed behind Leonce.

She points and smiles, moving to the child. She stops.

LISA
Wait, who is this?

EXT. KIKWIT MAIN ROAD - DAY

Neva reaches the intersecting road where a sign is posted 'TO KINSHASA'.

She GASPS for air. Neva continues running.

INT. KINSHASA HOTEL ROOM 73 - DAY

Rufun eyes Arcel, who twitches as if he might wake.

Leonce holds his hands out in a calming gesture at Lisa and John.

JOHN
We've done everything right.

LISA
And now, our daughter isn't here?

LISA (CONT'D)
 I lay in bed at night
 dreaming for this moment.
 It's been years -

JOHN
 (quietly)
 I knew this was too good to
 be true.

LEONCE
 Mr. and Mrs. Powell. There was an
 attack.

RUFUN
 During a local uprising involving
 M23 soldiers, the girl you adopted
 was killed. Many people died, and
 new orphans were created.

LEONCE
 He is healthy. No disease. He
 needs a family. Look at him.

Lisa sits next to Arcel.

LISA
 What's wrong with him?

LEONCE
 He was tired from the journey and a
 little sick. He has had medicine
 to help him sleep.

RUFUN
 His mother and father were gunned
 down in a village massacre. Praise
 Jesus that you are here now, to
 save him.

LEONCE
 We will go to the Embassy as
 planned and carry out the adoption.
 After your final payment.

Lisa stares at Arcel.

John grabs documents from his backpack, waving them in
 Leonce's face.

JOHN
 All the papers have a girl's name
 on them. We had to get a passport,
 birth certificate. It says female.

LEONCE
 These things can be negotiated.

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