

The great tree

Characters

Narrator (The tree)

Cayden

George(Cayden's father)

Meihua (Cayden's mother)

James (Cayden's grandson)

Muthu

Xiaoming

Mohammed

Japanese soldiers

Act 1

The front of the stage is filled with houses built on wooden stilts with rusty zinc roofs. Under the houses, there are chickens, dogs and cats. Behind, there is a wild forest, unkempt and overgrown. As the audience enters the theatre, sounds of a peaceful village are played, such as the flowing of water, clucking of chickens and low chatter of villagers in various dialects.

After the audience is seated, lights begin to flicker vigorously, and smoke fills the stage. The sound of gunfire and the shouts of soldiers reverberated throughout the village.

Japanese soldiers: (Japanese soldiers storm in from the back)

Local 1: (rushes past him without bowing)

Japanese soldiers: (grabs him) ばかやろう!¹

// They begin to kick him. Suddenly, from the boot of a soldier a seed drops.//

Narrator: Not the most pleasant introduction, but this was how I found my new home. I am a Malayan Jackfruit tree, and must have been caught on his boot. I'm so ashamed this scoundrel played a part in bringing me here.

Japanese soldier: (walking away)二度と私を軽蔑してはいけない²

//Japanese soldiers leave//

Local 1: (groaning in pain) someone, please...

Local 2:(emerging from the nearby trees) I will hel...

// George enters. He is a European man wearing a short-sleeved khaki uniform with a Union Jack pinned to his epaulette//

¹ You idiot in japanese

² You will never disrespect me again in Japanese

George :(*interrupting*) I know a place to hide him. (stops to help local 1)

Local 1: (*bewildered*) W-w-what are – haven't your countrymen all left us?

George: (*chuckling*) I suppose you could say I've missed my flight home!

Local 3: Seriously, why didn't you leave like the others?

George:(*chuckling*)And say goodbye to my favourite teh tarik³? I'm British!

Meihua:(*walking towards George*) You have been helping so many locals hide from the Japanese soldiers. Where do you stay? How about you stay in my house to hide from the Japanese.

George: Are you sure you would want to invite a stranger to your house?

Meihua: (*jokingly*) Would you stay in someone's house so quickly? What if I am a serial killer?

George: Jokes aside, if I am caught you will be badly punished.

Meihua:You are talking to the hide-and-seek champion in the village! They will never be able to find you.

Narrator:(*in awe*) It really was love at first sight.

Local 2: (*scared*) There is no time for chitchat, they are back.

Meihua: (*pulling George*) Let's quickly hide in my place.

George: (*winking*) Sounds like a date.

// everyone runs off the stage//

Narrator: It seemed I was not the only seed that was planted that day. As I grew so did their relationship.

Curtain closes

Act 2

As the curtains rise up bird noises are played. At the front of the stage is a magnificent jackfruit tree with long and wide branches. On the branches, many bird nests can be seen. At the back of the stage, there are many houses built with concrete. Even the windows are made of glass.

Cayden:(*shouting*)Thanks mom and I will see you later.(*dashing out of the house*)

Cayden:(*running towards the jackfruit tree gleaming with joy*) I can finally play.

// Group of boys from different races play around.//

Narrator: It seemed like yesterday when they were all born, look at how they have grown. I feel so old.

Cayden: Thanks for letting me play mom.(*rushing towards the jackfruit tree*)

George: Don't forget to come home before sunset.

Meihua: You are wearing your old clothes right.

Cayden: Okay,bye.

Narrator:What a peaceful environment... At least it seems so on the outside.

³ A local tea from Singapore

Xiaoming:(pointing to Muthu bindi on the head) What is that ? Does laser release from there

Narrator: Externally, the war was over, but internally, the war was ferocious.

Everyone turns towards Cayden.

Muthu:(sneering) Look at this albino, he better not tax our tea.

Mohammed: What is this mix-breed doing here?

Xiaoming: Do not turn red like a lobster here.

Narrator: It seems as if the only time there is true racial harmony is when they unite against this poor Cayden.

Cayden:(climbing the tree while laughing) Haha, you guys try catching me here.

Narrator: Ow! Slow down you are too heavy for me

Mohammed:(annoyed) Just because you can climb a tree does not make you special.

Muthu:(plucking the twigs of the tree and throwing them at Cayden) Just wait till I hit you.

Narrator: Stop plucking my hands. It hurts.

A local walks up on stage.

Local 4: Boys stop teasing him before I tell your parents. This ⁴kampung is built through trust and love for one another. Although he is very different he is still one of us.

The boys:(unanimously) fineeee!

The group of boys and locals walk off the stage.

Cayden: Why did they leave, we were just playing.

Narrator: Ignorance sure is bliss. I truly wish that the neighbourhood could be more inclusive.

Lights out.

Act 3

As the light switches on, the theatre is engulfed by the sounds of bulldozers.

Narrator:(confused) Why is everyone around me? Am I that beautiful and famous ?

//A developer wearing a pristine suit and construction helmet walks onto the stage followed by a group of bulldozers.//

Developer:(shouting) Please move this area must be demolished for the brand new HDB⁵, even the tree must go. You will all be given proper houses to live in.

Narrator:(shocked) They want to kill me! I am still young, I still have so much to live for.

Cayden: As the village chief, I cannot allow this to happen

Developer: I understand your anger, but we bought this land, if you try to stop us we would have to call the police.

Cayden: This tree has seen more history than us. We can't let you erase it.

Developer:Looks like I will need to call the police to move you away.

Cayden: Wait! We are willing to leave the village only if you promise us that the tree will be allowed to stand strong.

Developer: That seems atrocious, my boss would never allow this.

// A BMW enters the stage. A well dressed man leaves the car.//

Cayden:(dejected) Mohammed although you may not like me could you save the tree.

⁴ Malay for village

⁵ Singapore public housing built by the government.

Mohammed: NO!

Cayden: Please our heritage with the tree runs as deep as the tree's roots.

Mohammed: No, I never hated you. Of course I will save the tree. It was also my childhood.

Muthu: Neither do I hate you.

Xiaoming: Neither do I.

//All the people in the kampung unite together into a human chain. The Chinese, Malay and Indians side by side.//

Narrator: For the first time, race did not separate us, everyone was working together. I must be quite special to do that aren't I?

Light dims

ACT 4

In the front of the stage the tree still stands strongly, it is now surrounded by other trees too. At the back of the stage, HDB blocks tower over the tree. At the side of the stage, a group of Malay, Chinese and Indian boys are playing football.

Narrator:(excited) Look who it is. I have not seen him around for a long time.

//Cayden and his grandson, James, walk towards the tree from the side of the stage.//

James: I have to write an essay on a hero, so why are we here?

Cayden:(pointing towards the tree) That tree is my idol.

James: (pointing towards the tree) That is funny. The tree looks quite big compared to the other trees. Is it older than you?

Cayden: Of course. I used to climb it all the time to play during my youth. Too bad my knees gave up on me.

James:(jokingly) How is the tree older than dinosaurs like you?

Narrator:(jokingly) It is about time he gets laughed at for being old like me. It seems like yesterday when he was fighting for my survival, who would have guessed 40 years have passed since then.

James: What memorable thing happened to this tree.

Cayden: I can think of a few, like going through World war 2 or uniting us during a time of huge racism.

James: So is this tree like a hero or something?

Cayden: (Touching the bark of the tree) I guess it is something like that. (A tear drips from his eye.)

Narrator: I am far from a hero, they solved all these problems by themselves. I guess I was just lucky to witness the growth of this community.

Curtains close and the light dims