

Ackee and Saltfish

by
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FADE IN:

EXT. PARK - DAY

Starched, up-kept and school-uniformed, MARVIN, 8, and JOSEPH, 12, are juggling a football in an open field. Marvin watches in awe, giggling, as he begins to chase Joseph. Joseph continues to show-off his skill, counting each touch while his focus remains on the ball - deftly dodging Marvin's swats.

HILDA (O.S.)
BOOOYS! Time to go!

Marvin screeches with laughter as Joseph kicks the ball as high as he can; Marvin runs after it, giggling. HILDA, 29, ironed into a seamstress' uniform, fighting tired eyes, jolts up from the bench and pushes a little black book into her battered purse. Joseph quickly grabs the ball and hurries to collect his belongings from the bench, as Marvin trails him to put on his backpack. Hilda purses her lips at Joseph.

HILDA
Boy, clean the damn ash of ya knees! Ya
wanna walk around lookin' like ya
comin' from Trench Town?

Joseph throws his head down and brushes off his knees. Marvin's eyes meet Hilda's glare and quickly bends down to clean his knees. Joseph picks up the football, eclipsed by his mother's shadow.

EXT. OUTSIDE APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY (AFTERNOON)

Hilda, Joseph, and Marvin walk along the pavement - fixtures of the dilapidated public housing units above them - one story of many. Marvin is atop Hilda's shoulders and Joseph walks several paces ahead of them - skillfully kicking the football. Hilda inaudibly chastises Joseph and firmly sticks out her arm, waiting for Joseph to grab it; Joseph kicks up the ball and trudges over.

Hilda readjusts her grasp on Marvin's calf, her fingers raw and bandaged. Marvin cranes his neck to press his cheek against Hilda's. He tightens his eyes.

HILDA

Ma's gonna burn up them pots the
Jamaican way. Gonna make ya old
favorite - that *Ackee and Saltfish*

Hilda is met with silence from her sons and her eyebrows and accusingly looks up at MARVIN.

HILDA

The tree's gonna see it's roots

Marvin rolls back his head and Joseph looks over and chuckles. Joseph contorts his face to grab Marvin's attention to no avail and begins to sprint ahead.

MARVIN

NO NO NO NO!

Marvin throws his backpack on the ground, scales down Hilda's back, and sprints to catch Joseph.

INT. APARTMENT COMPLEX STAIRWELL - DAY (AFTERNOON)

The labored sprint of Joseph is followed by the whiz of Marvin's run. Hilda finally meets the boys' starting position and her face grows more tired with each step.

EXT. BALCONY OF APARTMENT - DAY (AFTERNOON)

The jingle and turn of apartment keys are heard, as is a rush of non-audible diegetic conversation between the boys as they enter the apartment. Hilda draws the blinds and the incoming light reveals the interior of the apartment, a council estate flat with dated furnishing and appliances - the space is orderly yet there is a layer of dust in each crevice. Joseph and Marvin are seen taking off their shoes in the background and placing them by the kitchen. Hilda exits the frame momentarily while the boys

plop their backpacks on the dining table and collapse into unstable wooden chairs. Hilda picks up the shoes and retreats into the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY(AFTERNOON)

The fridge door swings open and Hilda tosses a couple of ingredients on the counter top - all while keeping her head buried in the fridge. She slowly carries out a pot with a tin-foil covering and lays it on the counter top. She takes off the foil and checks the fillets. She grabs a fork and probes the three pieces of cod, swirling her reflection in the water and covers it with the foil.

INT. DINING TABLE - DAY(AFTERNOON)

Joseph's pencil is darting across the page as he rushes to complete his homework. Marvin is sitting against the window sill lost in a daydream. Marvin huffs on the window glass creating a fog, and uses his finger to inscribe, "NUNES #34," and the English flag below it. In a whisper, Marvin imitates the roar of a football crowd.

HILDA (O.S.)

I don't want to hear no TV sounds
before that homework is done. I don't
care what team is playing.

JOSEPH

Only have a worksheet and I'm almost
done!

HILDA (O.S.)

Boy... you better be speaking the truth.
(beat)
Victory nu come fram lie dung inna
bead.

JOSEPH

(laughing)
Fam... he's not in a bed!

MARVIN
(laughing)
Yeah, fam.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY (AFTERNOON)

Hilda is sitting on a stepladder with the boys' shoes neatly beside her. Resting on her lap is a biscuit tin.

HILDA
It means success requires hard work in
Patois... "our language."

Met with radio silence, Hilda becomes agitated and throws down the lid of the tin, revealing that the contents inside are materials for shoe-shining. Hilda grabs the final shoe and fits it between her knees, dips the rag in black polish, and holds the cloth taught to buff the shoe. The pot begins to over-boil and she rushes to turn off the stove and drain the water.

INT. APARTMENT- DAY (AFTERNOON) - CONTINUOUS

Hilda walks past the dining room, hugging an empty laundry basket, to the terrace.

EXT. BALCONY - DAY (MAGIC HOUR)

Hilda ducks under the clothes line and begins to unclasp each laundry peg. She folds the charity-bought clothing. She looks through two hung rags to check on her sons; they are glued to the TV screen. She takes down the final bedsheet and shakes it- the fabric billowing.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Marvin is sitting on the sofa as Joseph fiddles with the TV remote. Joseph flips the channel to football and raises the volume to an extremely high level. The game is about to begin.

JOSEPH

Go get the flag!

Marvin runs off-screen to the bedroom.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Hilda is finishing up cooking. Hearing the growing noise from the TV, she starts humming a Jamaican Mento song, "Linstead Market."

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Marvin runs back into the living room grasping a large British flag and hands it to Joseph, who ties it around his shoulders as a cape. As kick-off begins, Joseph puts his hand to his face to salute and Marvin mimics his action.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Hilda removes the tags from the newly bought placemats, with excitement. Carrying the placemats and the old mismatched cutlery, she strolls out of the kitchen to the dining area.

INT. DINING AREA/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Hilda precisely arranges the table setting and glances over to see the boys standing erect. She pauses in confusion yet dismisses the playful action.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

As Hilda plates the meal, she wipes the rim of the plate to clean up any excess sauce - chuffed at the final product. She carries the dish out to the dining room table.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Joseph and Marvin begin screaming, in celebration, as their team has scored. Joseph runs around the living room in a caped superhero pose as Marvin jumps around and begins chasing him. They both hop back on the sofa.

INT. DINING AREA/LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

HILDA

Boys... come and eat ya food.

Joseph and Marvin skip over to the dining table. Marvin grabs his chair, originally sat next to his mother and drags it beside his brother- along with his place setting. Hilda, sitting at the head of the table, purses her lips and motions Marvin to go back to his original seat. The boys look at their meals with disillusionment. Marvin pinches his nose because of the smell.

JOSEPH

Fam, what is this...?

(Said in a nasal, high-pitched
voice)

Hilda flashes a piercing glare, flaring her nostrils at what has become of her son's language.

HILDA

Huh?

(beat)

Ya tellin' me it ain't Ackee and
Saltfish?!...Boy, don't be a damn jesta
It's your favorite.

Joseph mutters under his breath.

JOSEPH

Ain't anymore.

Marvin and Joseph twirl their forks around and squirm in their chairs, avoiding eating the dish. Joseph pushes the plate away from him. Marvin looks at Joseph and pushes his plate further. Stunned by their reaction, Hilda stops eating and puts down her cutlery, and her eyes widen with rage.

HILDA

Wah yuh ah duh?!

JOSEPH

Speak english.

Hilda stares at Joseph in horror. She looks over to Marvin who has diverted his focus to the TV. Joseph leans forward to check if the game is back on. Marvin turns back to Hilda.

MARVIN

There chips from last night?

Hilda is frozen. Her eyes begin to glaze over.

HILDA

(beat)

No. Eat your food

Marvin picks up a pepper with his fork and examines it.

MARVIN

Ketchup?

Hilda looks down at all three plates. A beat. She angrily gets up from the table to rush to the kitchen. Joseph and Marvin exchange glances.

Joseph stands up on his chair and expressively shows disgust for the plate, physically cowering. Marvin silently chuckles.

Hilda comes back to the table, bottle in hand, witnessing Joseph's performance. Joseph quickly jumps down into his seat.

Hilda places the ketchup bottle down on the table and Marvin swipes it and begins to hit the bottom of the bottle. The ketchup flings out in a farting noise, covering most of the plate. Both boys howl. Hilda remains with her eyes fixed on the food. Joseph starts mimicking a farting noise and Marvin chimes in.

Joseph imitates a Jamaican accent.

JOSEPH

"Da ting" smells like it!

Both of the boys cackle in a fit of laughter.

HILDA

EAT YOUR FOOD!!!!

A wave of silence falls over the room and the boys bow down their heads to eat the dish. Marvin looks up at Hilda and offers her the ketchup bottle. With a disappointed silence, Hilda looks at Marvin's offer knowing it too would ruin the delicacy and her efforts. She bats her eyes closed and grabs the bottle from Marvin's hand.

The game comes back on with the announcer claiming Britain is winning.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Dirty pots lay strewn along the countertop. Hilda, sitting crouched on the stepladder, starts eating from the boys' plates, and shakes the ketchup all over the ackee. Whipping open the fridge, she searches the shelf and grabs a take out container and pours the chips over the Ackee and Saltfish, and dips them into the mix of ackee and ketchup.

INT. DINING TABLE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Hilda sits motionless at the head of the table. She reaches down and fumbles through her bag to grab her little black book. Thumbing through the pages, she reaches for the cordless telephone beside her. Her fingers hover over the buttons in hesitation. In a spur, she quickly dials the number and places the phone against her cheek. No answer. She dials the number again. As each ring passes, her eyes begin to tear. She places

the phone down with a deep breath. Her eyes shut in a brief moment of prayer, and she plays her answering machine (the boys are heard in their old, native Jamaican accents):

HILDA (V.O.)
The Nunes Family-

MARVIN (V.O.)
NOW IN LONDON!!

JOSEPH (V.O.)

WOOO!

HILDA (V.O.)
Are not able to answer the phone right now.

MARVIN (V.O.)
SO PLEASE LEAVE YOUR NAME AND NUMBER,
OKAY?!

JOSEPH AND MARVIN (V.O.)
BYEEEE!

Hilda gives a soft belly-laugh and begins to wipe her tears. She smiles and pushes her chair back, collects the placemats, and pensively strolls to the kitchen.

THE END.