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# **About My FATHER'S Accent**

He knows it's there. He knows it's thick, thicker even than my mother's. He's been on American soil for nearly thirty years, but his voice sounds like Port-au-Prince, the crowded streets, the blaring horns, the smell of grilled meat and roasting corn, the heat thick and still.

In his voice, we hear him climbing coconut trees, gripping the trunk with his bare feet and sandy legs, cutting coconuts down with a dull machete. We hear him dancing to *konpa*, the palm of one hand resting against his belly, his other hand raised high in the air as he rocks his hips from side to side. We hear him telling us about Toussaint L'Ouverture and Henri Christophe and the pride of being first free black. We hear the taste of bitterness when he watches the news from home or calls those left behind.

When we, my brothers and I, mimic him, he smiles indulgently. Before every vowel an "h", at the end of every plural, no "s."

"You make fun, but you understand me perfectly, don't you?" he says. We nod. We ask him to say *American Airlines*. We gasp for air when he gives in.

For many years, we didn't realize our parents had accents, that their voices sounded different to unkind American ears. All we heard was home.

Then the world intruded. It always does.



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