

You Can't Say That

by

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SCENE 1:

INT. - CLASSROOM - DAY

KOFI, a young black teenager, sits at his desk, waiting for class to start. The room is full of energy, odour, and the freedom only granted to students whilst waiting for a replacement teacher. Kofi sits silently, scrolling through baking recipies on his phone, catching glimpses of conversation around him.

VOICE 1 (O.S)

... You've gotta watch the second film ASAP, it's so much better...

VOICE 2 (O.S)

... I really don't think he should've been voted off...

VOICE 3 (O.S)

... And that's when I slapped that nigga, right in his face!

Kofi stops scrolling and looks up, discomfort in his face. He looks around the room and stops his search on SMITH, his white classmate, who makes a slapping motion with his hand as his friends around him laugh.

Kofi stands up with a jolt, the sound of his chair scraping across the worn out carpet alerting the rest of his class, who divert their attention to him.

KOFI

(nervously)

You... You shouldn't be saying that Smith.

Kofi looks around nervously, hoping someone else would speak up.

Silence.

Smith, looking agitated, stands up too.

SMITH

Say what?

KOFI

(breathing heavily)

You know... The N word...

SMITH

(mockingly)

What, nigga? It's just a word man. Or should I say, my nigga?

KOFI

Stop it!

DANI, a shy black girl behind Smith, raises her hand before putting it down again, realising it's not a class discussion.

DANI

I don't think you should say it either...

SMITH

Shut up. No one likes you, or cares what you have to say nitty.

The class starts laughing at this, and Dani sinks into her chair.

KOFI

Leave her alone...

Kofi starts shaking, as Smith walks towards him.

SMITH

Mind your business nigga. Go do something useful, like make coffee. Because that's your name right? Coffee?

Smith continues walking towards Kofi, with an almost endless supply of confidence, fuelled by privilege and peer approval.

SMITH

(cont'd)

Don't have much to say now do you? I don't see what the problem is, it's just a word. If you can say it, then I should be able to say it too, right? Nigga. Nigga, nigga, nigga.

KOFI

Please stop...

Kofi has tears welling up in his eyes, and Smith is unbearably close, his face centimeters away from Kofi's.

SMITH

Or would you prefer... Nigger?

In a brief flash of anger, Kofi's face drops and he punches Smith across the face, without missing a beat. He pushes Smith to the side and runs out of the classroom, leaving his bag and phone behind. He's breathing heavily and tears are pouring down his face. He runs out onto the field and hides behind a tree, with a sense of dread washing over him like a storm as he silently cries alone.

SCENE 2:

INT. - HEADTEACHER'S OFFICE - DAY

With his head pointed at the floor, Kofi listens to the voices of his mother, AFIA and HEADTEACHER as he tries to make himself disappear.

HEADTEACHER

Unfortunately, Kofi incited the violence. Whilst we can't be sure of what Smith said, he most definitely has a bloody nose which came from Kofi. He'll face a week's suspension.

AFIA

Are you kidding me? Did you not hear what that kid called my son? I-I work all week, what am I supposed to do?

HEADTEACHER

I'm afraid you'll have to figure that out yourself. What Kofi did was unacceptable.

AFIA

And what punishment is the other kid getting?

HEADTEACHER

Nothing, as of now. He's been hit pretty hard, and we still need to look into what REALLY happened. In fact, I'm about to have a talk with his parents in about 5 minutes, so I'm afraid we'll have to wrap this up.

Afia looks at the headteacher with complete disbelief. Kofi's head is still pointed at the floor. The headteacher slides something across the desk.

HEADTEACHER

(con'd)

Here's Kofi's bag and phone. He left them behind in class, his friend Dani brought them to us.

AFIA

What happened to the screen? Why is it cracked. Kofi, it was fine this morning right?

She passes Kofi the phone, and he brings his head up to look at his now cracked screen. He nods.

KOFI

It was fine... At the start of class...

AFIA

So I'm sure that kid broke it then
huh... What are you gonna do about
this then?

HEADTEACHER

Well, unfortunately, there's no
proof anyone did this. Dani
could've easily dropped it when
bringing it to us.

AFIA

Oh that's a load of bull-

She cuts herself off and takes a deep breath.

AFIA

(cont'd)

Come on Kofi, let's go.

They stand up and leave, Afia's arm wrapped around Kofi.

SCENE 3:

INT. - HALLWAY - DAY

AFIA

It's ok, I believe you.

As they walk down the hallway, they come across Smith and his PARENTS. His FATHER looks at them with disgust in his eyes and his MOTHER aggressively shields him.

SMITH'S MOTHER

So this is the delinquent who hurt
my precious baby? All trouble, the
lot of you.

SMITH'S FATHER

You lay a hand on my boy again and
you'll regret it. You lot should be
thankful you're even in this
country, let alone touching our
kids.

Smith catches a glimpse of Kofi's face and mockingly mouths the word 'nigga' at him.

Afia looks at them with a calm, suppressed rage. She wraps her arm around Kofi even tighter and speaks -

AFIA

I'm sorry about what happened to
your son. But I beg of you, leave
my boy alone. That's all I ask.

Afia continues to walk away, holding Kofi close to her. Kofi can't see it, as he's staring at the ground, but his mother is crying. Crying for her son, because she knows they won't.

SCENE 4:

EXT. - CARPARK - DAY

Kofi looks up at his mother as they approach their car.

KOFI

I'm sorry mum... I didn't mean to,
I just got, really angry...

AFIA

It's ok Kofi, I know you meant
well. It's just... You can't hit
people everytime they wrong you. I
know it's hard, but that's what
they want. They don't lose anything
if you fight them. But you lose
everything. I've told you this
before, right?

Kofi nods.

AFIA

I know you're a good kid. I believe
what you've told me. I know what
it's like out there. These racists
are everywhere... But you're
stronger and smarter than them.
You're better than them.

KOFI

I'm sorry I got suspended... I can,
I can take care of myself for the
week, so you can work... I can-

AFIA

Hey, don't worry about that. That's
for me to worry about. You have to
worry about homework, and actually
doing your chores. Worry about
being a kid, as much as you can.

Kofi adopts an apprehensive look as he stares down at the
floor again.

AFIA

I said don't worry...

KOFI

I'm sorry you had to leave work
early... I...

Before he can continue, Afia pulls him into a hug.

KOFI

(cont'd)

... I wanted to get home before
you... And bake you a surprise
cake...

Kofi starts to cry.

KOFI
(cont'd)
Happy birthday mum.

Afia holds her son tight and gently places her hand on his head. They stand there still and silent, as though the world has vanished, and it's only them, alone together. Afia looks down at her son, with loving eyes, yet full of sadness.

CUT TO BLACK.

AFIA
Thank you baby.

END.