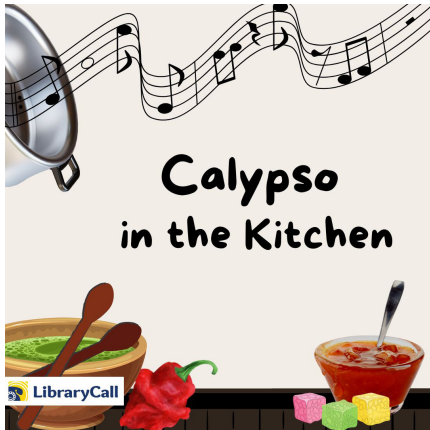


Calypso in the Kitchen



By Lauren Kratz Prushko

To listen call:

(calypso music sound effect)

“It’s Saturday!” That is Ruby’s first thought when she wakes up. Then, she hears the movement of the steel pans and pots hitting the stovetop in the kitchen. Ruby’s mom is getting ready for the aunties, the uncles, and cousin Shaun to visit.

“Ruby!” Ruby’s mom both sings and shouts her name. “It’s time to get up!”

A new sound emerges from the kitchen. (calypso music sound effect)

Calypso music is playing, and Ruby hears the steel pan drum. Now the day has officially begun.

As Ruby brushes her teeth, she thinks, “I will be brave today, and I will try all the food on the table and not just eat the cheesy macaroni pie.”

Ruby’s mom and her family are from Trinidad and Tobago, and they are bouncy and fun and sing when they talk. But Ruby is shy, and she always has to repeat herself because no one can hear her.

As she walks into the kitchen, she smells the scent of something. Ruby tiptoes over to the stove and peeks into the boiling steel pot.

“Oh no!” she whispers. It’s Pig’s feet!

“Now, Ruby,” her mom says kindly. “You don’t have to eat the Pig Feet Souse.”

Mom looks at her watch, claps, and says, “We will have plenty of time. Anytime is Trinidad time!” Ruby looks at her watch, and she sees numbers.

“Your aunties and uncles are always running late. So we can have a little breakfast and maybe a treat while we wait.”

On the table, Ruby spies a jar of mango chutney. The bright yellow liquid and the small chunks of mango peeking out are fun to see, but Ruby has never tried it before. Mom sits down with a spoon and spreads the chutney onto her eggs.

“Here, Ruby,” mom says and remembers to give Ruby the ketchup.

“Mom, please pass the mango chutney.”

Mom tries to hide her smile. “Ruby, this chutney has scotch bonnet pepper. But let’s put a small drop on your eggs since you are adventurous this morning.” Ruby slowly puts a forkful of eggs and the tiny drop-let of bright, spicy mango chutney into her mouth. Ruby closes her eyes, and this makes her feel more courageous. Her tongue tingles a little, but that’s all!

After breakfast, Ruby’s mom slides over the candy dish. Is there chocolate inside or lollipops? No, today there are jubbys! Soft, chewy, and coated in sugar. “Just one,” mom says. Oh, so sweet!

Ruby hears voices of her family talking over each other and laughing all at once. Ruby’s uncles, aunties, and cousin Shaun burst inside holding paper bags filled with a snack, doubles! Fried dough and spiced chickpeas. Ruby stands at the center of a party even though it’s no one’s birthday.

“Hello darling,” her uncles say, and her aunties kiss her. Ruby’s cousin Shaun gives her a huge smile that reaches his eyes and shows all his

teeth. Ruby’s Auntie Heather immediately tells a story about something that happened at her church. Ruby tries to listen closely but ends up confused. Then Auntie Heather ends her story by saying, “Monkey knows which tree to climb.”

Ruby laughs to herself and imagines a monkey climbing a tree right outside her window. Auntie Heather says, “That’s right, Ruby, you don’t let anyone get you into trouble or take advantage of you. So lead yourself and don’t follow, my dear niece.”

Uncle Gregory turns up the music when he hears The Mighty Sparrow start to sing. Shaun starts to mime his movements like in Woodbrook, Trinidad playing steelpan with the Invaders. The names of these musicians sound like superheroes! Ruby’s favorite name is Calypso Rose. Uncle Ronnie is busy trying to get a cricket game on television in the living room. Cricket is a sport played between two teams of eleven players each. One group, batting, tries to score runs while the other team is fielding and trying to prevent the other team from scoring. Shaun and Ruby walk in front of the TV and think about what to do while they wait to eat.

Uncle Ronnie booms, “Your father is a glassmaker or what?”

“I can’t see the cricket match while you both are blocking my view!”

Shaun and Ruby run away giggling. Ruby watches Shaun play a game on his phone, but today is different.

“Shaun, let’s play Limbo!” she shouts excitedly. (limbo music sound effect)

Shaun looks up, surprised. Ruby finds a yardstick in the closet. They jump up and down and take turns bending backward to pass under the

yardstick, shoved between the door jam. Uncle Gregory comes by to help lower the yardstick after each turn, but it seems like he wants to play too!

Mom sings and shouts that the food is ready. We sit at the kitchen table and look around at all the food and say our thanks. Uncle Ronnie starts the meal by eating a whole scotch bonnet pepper. He pops the pepper in his mouth like it's a jubjub candy. Now the meal has officially begun.

"Ruby," Mom says, "I can put together a plate of food for you."

"Doubles without the chickpeas and a piece of macaroni pie?" Auntie Myrna teases.

"Mom, I will serve myself today," Ruby says. Everyone stops what they are doing to watch Ruby.

"Okay, Ruby," Mom looks down to hide her smile. Bowls of food started appearing next to Ruby instead of being passed over her. Ruby carefully spoons the callaloo made from okra, a green vegetable shaped like a tube, over her food and eats the doubles with the spicy chickpeas instead of just the fried bread. Ruby still does not eat the Pig Feet Souse, but she eats everything else!

Auntie Myrna even pours Mauby, a drink made out of boiled bark from the carob tree, into Ruby's cup. Ruby takes a sip and feels proud, even though she would rather drink apple juice instead.

Today, Ruby feels different. Her aunts and uncles hug her longer than usual as they leave. Ruby's family is bouncy and fun, and they sing when they talk. But her family is also sweet, like the brown sugar in stewed chicken, and bright and vibrant like the sound of the steel pan drum.

"See you next Saturday!" Ruby sings and shouts as she waves goodbye.

(calypso music sound effect)