

# Greetings from Jamaica

I remembered when you announced proudly that we were going to Jamaica  
I said ... what again? ... because it wasn't like we hadn't been there before  
And you said ... You're much older now, you'll be able to appreciate it much more  
I knew better not to answer back ... but in my head I thought  
I don't want to go back to your country ... where it made me feel foreign  
Like it did before  
But you know ... I'm not paying ... and it's a free holiday  
When are we going then?  
In three weeks time  
What? But that's Christmas?  
Yes ... and Jamaica will be much cooler then  
Whow Whow Whow and at this point I'm stamping my feet  
But I don't want to miss Christmas in England  
What about all my presents ... you know ... the ones that will be under the tree  
But you ignored what I said ... and I knew ... I didn't have a say

Now ... I know right now you ... may be thinking ... I sound a little spoilt  
Like some petulant teenager, who doesn't know that they're born  
But here's a thing that I'm not sure you would really understand  
Unless  
If like me ... you were born in England ... and also ... born black

You see, Jamaica for you was the place where you were born  
And so became the place ... you rightly referred to ... as being 'back home'  
And England for me ... well ... was the place where I felt I didn't belong

I will never forget the mornings  
With those roosters ... starting up their noise  
And you yelling at me  
'Come on, time to get up'  
And me telling you, pleading with you,

'Ooorgh I'm so tired, please, can't you switch them off'  
'This is'  
You said  
'How Jamaica begins its day'

*Good morning*

I loved how we swam before breakfast,  
At the beach, that we had to ourselves,  
The sea that was sometimes blue and sometimes green  
And was always ... so crystal clear

And I remember  
you wore a swimming costume that we had never ever seen before  
It was covered in the biggest boldest brightest flowers  
And came with a matching swimming cap as well  
A cap decorated with large rubber petals  
Complete with an elasticated strap for your chin  
Which was odd ... because you only ever sat by the water's edge  
And never once did I see you go in

In the afternoons we would jump the foaming waves,  
But I struggled when I was snatched  
Swept under  
Turned over  
And spun upside down  
As salt water dived in my throat

It made me vomit ... and it filled up my nose  
My eyes were forced shut  
So I couldn't see ... couldn't speak ... couldn't breathe  
Then ... something took hold of my waist  
And a voice said ... don't worry ... you'll be ok

As we floated back to safety  
I could see you on the beach  
there you stood // with your arms outstretched  
And that familiar beacon ... still strapped upon your head  
I was handed to you ... it was just such a relief  
It was then ... my fear began  
Of that sometimes blue ... sometimes green of the sea

We would listen to the cries of the fisherman ... as they drifted in from the sea  
Dragging wooden dugout canoes ... along the white sands of the Beach  
Villagers descended and money exchanged  
Buying up  
Mackerel  
Jackfish  
Kingfish  
and whatever happen to be the catch of the day

Their canoes are alive with ... lobsters ... crabs ... and shrimps  
All crawling and clambering over piles of fresh fish  
Still twitching and flapping and stinking  
And I'm thinking  
I'm not eating any of this

Along the dirt track, marched those wide brimmed hats  
In pastel shades and vivid hues  
Canary yellows peacock blues  
Marching to the rhythm of the church bells that ring  
Their hips swinging as they hum their favourite hymns  
Handbags dangle ... from the crooks of their arms  
Singing halleluiah ... and praise be the Lord

Colourful houses came with verandas at the front  
Around the back ... small plots of land would be divided into tiny farms  
You taught me how to look after the goats,  
Which I named April ... May and June

May would follow me everywhere,  
But April and June ... always ignored me ... and would go their separate ways  
until one day ... they just weren't there

One of Jamaica's many national dishes is ... curried goat and rice

I'd be envious of the girls and boys as they walked home from school  
in their khaki shorts and dresses  
their legs and faces so shiny with grease  
and their satchels strapped across their bodies  
You asked me '*would I like to go to school right here in Jamaica?*'  
and I looked at you // and I said  
'No'

At the end of the day ... the veranda was where I would find you,  
Feet up ... with your hat crooked upon your head  
And a glass of Appleton rum  
That seemed to be never far from your hand

I listened to bedtime stories of the adventures Brother Anansi  
And noted their moral undertones,  
Don't go near boys,  
Don't get pregnant  
Don't take anything ... that isn't yours  
And under no circumstances ... do not bring the police to my front door,

but I always loved your stories of the scary duppies best.