

## Spithead summers

I envy the force with which the sun turns my skin from brown to gold. I was sitting at the dock. “What’s up, young blood?” A man made the jump from the small boat with an outboard engine to where I sat, nobody had time to tie up. He was holding a garbage bag which is only memorable because it didn’t smell of anything. At Spithead, what you see and hear takes precedence. That’s most places in Bermuda where the water is clear through to the bottom. That only leaves out the marshes and swamps. The two men who drove the boat to the dock where the jumping man got off, disappeared far along into the beam of light that made the water dance and my forehead drip. My eyes tracked a striped fish and burned from two streams of sweat flooding my sight like beaches along the Dead Sea. A sergeant major marched through several pillars of light standing slanted in the depth of the water, from bedrock to surface, like a family of sunflowers. I don’t like the look of a fish unless it’s passing through a beam of light because then I’m not reminded of fish, only of the golden color that makes everything about our crystalline surfaces magic.

For whatever reason, black men don’t enjoy aging. Uncle Roddy reminded me of this as he came down the steps at the dock. We played the game every older black man loves to play. I indulged him with a wildly flattering low-ball of a guess and his demeanor lifted while he peeled his shirt off. He’s my uncle-by-marriage, and this is Bermuda. You have to flatter the people you see on fate’s accord with all sorts of pleasantries. You also have to know that your uncle won’t ever bump into you at the dock without a story to tell, and you’re lucky if it’s one. These are the guarantees in a Bermuda summer, that you’ll see someone who will speak to you like they know you, young blood. I said fifty-five and he smiled. He said seventy-five and I joined him, smiling. This game keeps its shock-value no matter how many times you play. Black men keep getting younger in old age; black women too, but black women are private enough to keep their secrets to youth heart-close. By the time I picked my jaw up and dusted it off, Uncle Roddy was back in Trinidad, telling me stories about the West Indies cricket team and how blatant it was to identify who the Trinidadians were. A mixed bunch of Dougla people who might as well have had the flag painted across their hybrid complexions. Roddy was a Dougla himself, his mother Venezuelan, his grandmother Indian, so you can imagine what shade of brown he was, almost golden; and he was disease-free, he wouldn’t let me forget. I joked that he’d left the second helping of doubles on the table during childhood lunches and that’s why his arteries were still open.

As the sun moved lower, more people arrived. Evening settled into my disposition. I knew there was a story in me about to exit, because everything started to feel serendipitous. Like we were all a part of some Caribbean skit, just missing refreshments. My former Tech teacher walked down the steps, a sparrow sat next to me, fish came to the surface, a food delivery man parked his bike on the sidewalk above us, and everyone joined the chorus of this very Bermudian event. We felt like characters in some great film. He remembered my last name but strained the veins in his forehead to recall my first. “Bushara,” he called out. I was fine to leave it there and continue the conversation, but Uncle Roddy

interjected and gave him information that widened his cheeks into an exasperated grin, “Yusef, that’s right. Yusef Bushara. How’s your mom?” Then the Russell’s came down from off Cedar Hill. Spithead was always spoken about in parish lore up there when I was a child. It must be a rite of passage to spend time here once you have enough distance from your childhood to make sense of it: Sitting off and thinking, swimming and thinking, treading water and thinking. *Spithead*. One of the Russell ladies looked up real nice—barely splashed too. Went under the water like covers. She began doing somersaults. Something about her movements were childish and made her feel not young but free. Uncle Roddy didn’t seem young but free, and same for my Tech teacher, not young but free as he strapped his goggles around his forehead and told me he was looking for turtles. As we spoke, their faces turned from brown to gold – not young but free in the Spithead summer sun.