

## Isle of Refuge

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“Excuse me, but do you know where the whipping post is?” The woman pulls her earbuds out of her head wrap and looks at me quizzically. “A whipping post? That’s crazy. No, I have no idea.”

This is not a typical tourist question. The woman, black, Bermudian, carries heels and a lunchbox, also black, in one hand. She is on her way home from work on a nondescript street—off the beaten path—where the bus driver deposited us with a gesture. She gives me a probing look and then moves on, shaking her head at both my interest in locating such a relic and the fact that it even exists.

My family has come with me to Bermuda. *They* are on spring break. I’m intent on following the African Diaspora Heritage Trail. Established by a conglomerate of historians and tourist outfits, the ADHT includes historic sites that relate the history of slavery in the Atlantic world, as well as monuments to significant black Bermudians. While my particular interest is motivated by personal and professional desires—I teach Afro-Caribbean literature,

I am of African descent—this trip actually falls under a particular category: heritage tourism.

How do you ride the Underground Railroad in reverse? Get off the Middle Passage in the middle? That's what it's like to plunge into Bermuda's black Atlantic, its sanguine Sargasso. Heritage tourism is travel motivated by a desire to comprehend the lived experience of chattel slavery by visiting archival sites such as *La Maison des Esclaves* at Gorée Island off the coast of Senegal and Cape Coast Castle in Ghana. I am not alone in my desire to locate and linger over what scholar-activist Salamishah Tillet calls "sites of slavery." Some consider heritage tourism a subgenre of the lucrative "dark" tourism industry, in which travelers tour former concentration camps or are guided through exhibits designed to simulate gas chambers. On this trip to Bermuda, I'm seeking a middle ground: a sojourn of consciousness, a quest for belonging.

Shortly after the woman turns a corner and disappears, the neighborhood tilts in a familiar way. Instinctively, my husband moves to my left. We quadrant the boys, who chatter loudly, their eyes inward, oblivious to the unleashed dogs, the less manicured lawns, the throaty, pitchy laughter of teenage boys perched like crows on a fence, who quiet as we pass by.

A few more blocks of aimless wandering and we find ourselves walking Bermuda's Railway Trail. Stretching helter-skelter the entirety of the island, this portion of the footpath is inland. It lacks coastal vistas, weaves past watermelon fields speckled with workers and basketball courts, and ends at an abandoned police station where we wait for the next bus. Just before we exit the trail, it turns verdant, becoming a thicket of ivy and hibiscus. What was once a lonely path becomes crowded with children on scooters, with runners and speed walkers. It could be the section of the bike path that skirts our home in Madison, Wisconsin, on a Sunday afternoon. I realize I've been holding my breath.

### **We Arrive**

Not surprisingly, the African Diaspora Heritage Trail isn't so easy to

follow. Fortunately, on our first day at Grotto Bay Resort in Hamilton Parish, the concierge, a no-nonsense woman named Phaedra, gives us day passes which we will use to ride coral-pink buses to Hamilton, where we will catch the fast ferry past Spanish Point on the way to the Royal Navy Dockyard across the bay.

“On the way to the city of Hamilton, as opposed to the Parish of Hamilton, you will pass through Tucker’s Point,” she says.

Like the rest of the resort’s impeccably dressed staff, Phaedra wears a severe navy suit alleviated by a floral scarf in pinks and lavenders. From her, we learn about Tucker’s Point and the land that once belonged to the people there. She remembers her grandmother sitting in a rocking chair, gazing toward her former home as luxury condos and private golf courses sprang up. In exchange, her family was granted lots in Devil’s Hole. As if one piece of property was like another. As if Oklahoma and Georgia were interchangeable.

“Devil’s Hole?” I say, incredulous, stifling bitter laughter at the absurdity of the entire premise.

Phaedra takes offense, misses my cynicism until I rattle off the places in the U.S. where land claims have been voided and plaques erected to commemorate communities that were once black: a collection of seaside apartments in Hilton Head, a row of stately mansions in Boston’s Back Bay. Relocation prompted by gentrification and outright thievery. It happens over and over. This displacement.

I suspect this is not a story that Phaedra typically shares with hotel guests. Unfortunately, put off by my avid curiosity, she refuses to elaborate further and hands over the bus passes to the Dockyard, which we will visit after Hamilton.

“No charge,” she says. With a furtive glance toward reception, she waves away our money.

Transportation costs are included for guests on the all-inclusive plan; we are on the European plan. Meals only. No frills. Phaedra extended to us what’s known in the States as a hookup, the homegirl discount. Nice to know it’s a thing in the diaspora, too. Our first stop in Hamilton is Sally Bassett’s statue. The statue depicts a woman bound in bronze situated in a circular viewing nook

adjacent to the Cabinet building. Her face is upturned to the sky so that her expression isn't visible from the street. Ropes bisect her dress, tightening around her hips and affixing her body to the stake. At her feet: kindling, and tucked amidst the tangle of twigs: fresh flowers.

Carlos Dowling's statue commemorating Bassett's burning evokes a torturous past, but details of her so-called crimes aren't accessible at the monument site. Her iconography, especially in the context of the reenacted dunkings of volunteer "witches" in nearby St. George's Square, emphasizes the punishment more than the act of the resistance that resulted in such a horrific fate.

Bermudians are fond of reenactments.

They interpret history from their own individual or collective perspective, like a Civil War reenactor imagining a victory rather than a defeat. These dramas enable a radical empathy triggered by a visceral experience of the past. They are therapeutic: participating in ritual psychodramas can lead to catharsis, an exorcising of persistent, collective trauma. Finally, they can be fun, allowing individuals to time travel to another place and time. All of these elements can be present at once. *The MAAFA Suite*, a ritual reenactment of enslavement sponsored by a church group and performed around the world, makes explicit the connections between Christ's suffering and the visceral and spiritual trauma of slavery. Here, posters advise a Passion Play that will be staged in St. George on Good Friday. Since the entire town is a World Heritage Site, no stage is needed, only the actors and accoutrements. It draws a crowd, but we will opt out.

According to oral history, Sally Bassett attempted to poison her master in the hope of protecting her granddaughter from the sexual predation commonplace in slavery. Oddly, her specifically Bermudian tale shares many characteristics with the stories of slave ghosts that have proliferated in U.S. dark tourism. Haunted plantations and ghost tours of Savannah, New Orleans, and Charleston often feature fearsome tales of enslaved women who attempted to poison their owners, often enlisting the aid of vodun or, as in Sally's case, obeah. Obeah

derives from a medley of West African religious practices, herbal/homeopathic medicine, oral history, and myth. Historically, root workers and folk medicine practitioners played a key role in the plantocracy. They were venerated among the enslaved for their knowledge and wisdom, and tolerated by slaveholders who needed someone to tend to their chattel's many ailments, as white doctors in the colonies were scarce and reluctant to treat them. Bassett had been accused of the offense once before and brutally punished. Her previous sentence was to be:

publicly whipt throughout Southampton Tribe . . . by the Constables of that Tribe; She receiving three lashes well laid on her nake Back at the End of every thirty paces from the West End of said Tribe to the East End of the same

Such a punishment would have resulted in nearly 100 lashes: agony commensurate with the whippings described in fellow Bermudian Mary Prince's 1831 narrative of enslavement. The beatings did not silence or stifle Bassett's resistant spirit, and eighteen years later on June 1, 1730, Bassett was burned seven days after she was found guilty, on an inordinately hot day. Thereafter, unseasonably warm weather in Bermuda's temperate clime would be known in the vernacular as "Sally Bassett Day."

My family moves on while I remain alone in the circle for a moment, chilled as much by the wind as the forthright impression of Bassett's statue against a blinding blue sky. Although offerings are placed at her feet, Bassett isn't deified or worshipped like New Orleans Voodoo Queen Marie Laveau. Still, the statue testifies to her bravery and the brutality of her punishment, and serves as a monument to the insidious cruelty of the plantocracy's sexual exploitation of women. I say a small prayer to honor her fierce mothering and reassure myself that it's not cruel or harmful to take our children along this route. I wonder, not for the first time, if I should peel off on my own.

The time-traveling aspect of our search for the artifacts and memorials of Atlantic slavery is seductive. For me, a twinge of pleasure mixes with the pain of acute awareness. The bizarre delight and horror that results from radical empathy. Embodied performance, such as following the Stations of the Cross

or allowing oneself to be imprisoned in stocks, enables a deeper understanding of past trauma, which in turn crystallizes its residual effects. One of my goals as a teacher is to render the historical in the present. I often show my students photographs that document the “peculiar institution’s” brutality. All my courses come with trigger warnings. As a mother, I find that confronting Atlantic slavery’s legacy 1,000 miles from where my children live its present aftermath makes the more corporeal aspects easier to absorb.

I catch up to my family and together we peek in the gift shops, perfumeries, and restaurants on Front Street before arriving at the next stop on ADHT: the seaside park of Barr’s Bay. As we descend the steps, we can’t miss the abstract sculpture titled “We Arrive.” This statue commemorates a legacy of cooperation and Samaritanism between U.S. blacks and black Bermudians. The graceful, sloping quintet of humanoid figures marks the 1835 docking site of the USS *Enterprise*, whose human cargo were given refuge and then freedom due to the efforts of Bermuda’s Friendly Societies. Hamilton displays “We Arrive” and Sally Bassett’s memorial in full public view marked with exquisite plaques that concisely narrate their history. One detail is especially poignant: every slave who disembarked was ensured freedom, but one woman chose to return with her five children. What made her refuse asylum? What family ties could not withstand the promise of freedom? What is freedom if you can never again see the ones you love?

The fluidity that allows a confluence of national, cultural, and ethnic identity may explain why my family and I feel so at home in this foreign space. Everywhere on this island we are greeted as children coming home for the Easter holidays. It’s a complete contrast to how our heteronormative, middle-class family is viewed in Wisconsin: a state where black children suffer among the highest rates of school attrition, poverty, and incarceration; where we are persistently asked “where are you from?” as if we beamed down from an alien spaceship. Here, the statue’s title bespeaks inclusion, “We Arrive,” as opposed to “*They* Arrive.”

From Barr’s Bay, it’s a short walk to the ferry terminal, where we board the

Sea Express to the Dockyard, one of the island's many World Heritage Sites. Halfway through the trip, I step outside of the speeding ferryboat's cabin and pin my back against the leeward side of the ship. I'm hoping for a glimpse of the settlement where Mary Prince was enslaved to Captain John Ingram.

"Is that Spanish Point?" I ask one of the sailors while struggling to focus my camera on the rocking deck.

"No, it's after the last buoy."

He gestures and I point my camera. We have already paid our respects at Crow Lane, where Mary Prince's father was a sawyer belonging to a shipbuilder. Prince was born in Brackish-Pond, now Devonshire Parish. Her travels as an enslaved woman take her from Bermuda to the Turks and Caicos and finally to England, where she succeeds in claiming her freedom. She dictates her slave narrative, *The History of Mary Prince*, as a testimony to enlighten the English, who she fears remain ignorant of the abuses their countrymen visit upon those held in bondage in the colonies:

I have often wondered how English people can go out into the West Indies and act in such a beastly manner. But when they go to the West Indies, they forget God and all feeling of shame.

Through the sea spray, my lens brings the ruins of Prince's former plantation shakily into focus. Imagining her toil on that desolate isthmus drives home my sense that radical empathy is more than abolitionist propaganda. Prince's narrative cautioned potential settlers against the island's wicked beauty and colonialism's limitless hunger for profit. Slavery will corrupt your soul, she warned, so you must undergo a spiritual revolution. In England, Prince joined the Monrovia Church; as a Christian, she believed that the words she dictated to her ghostwriter would transform readers, like the Bible saved her.

Radical empathy is both an external and an internal achievement propelled by a cooperation of environment and action. It goes by other names—rememory, bone memory, weathering—all concepts that started out as metaphors and were later proved accurate by scientists and psychologists. Trauma alters our

DNA. It's passed down just like my Aunt Marjorie's stories about our family's travels from Louisiana to Los Angeles during the Great Migration. If I inhabit (or avoid) spaces of ancestral pain, will I be released or caught in an endless quantum loop? Radical empathy can be the antidote to middle-aged cynicism. As an educator and an artist, I live in the thick of it. But there's a cost. There is always a cost.

After the failed search for the whipping post, the next day I consent to visit an appropriate, family-friendly tourist site: the Crystal Caves. Following our tour guide, we descend into the moist depths of a cavernous limestone structure far beneath the earth. There are several warnings regarding temperature fluctuations and thin air. This attraction is not for the pregnant, the infirm, or the claustrophobic. The steps are slick but the payoff is immeasurable. We find ourselves in a dreamland of stalactites and stalagmites reflected in translucent pools of water of unknown depth. Only the most experienced may descend and must take extreme care not to disturb the silt, which can create an underwater sand storm that blinds divers and makes it impossible to navigate the channels. We cross a bridge, admiring the rock sculptures molded by time and water into whimsical shapes.

"That's Harry Potter, there. See the wand?"

The tour guide encourages us to see marvels in the rock.

Our sons eagerly get into the spirit of the game, correctly identifying "Dumbo," a giraffe, and a rabbit.

The carnival of animals delights the children, while the varieties of stone, quartz, and the boardwalks over the water create a limestone fairyland that equally dazzles the adults.

"How were the caves discovered?" our older son asks.

Our guide, Harold, indulges my son's interruption, forgiving his rude curiosity in a way that is not tolerated in other public spaces on the island. My boys learn quickly to greet everyone from bus drivers to storeowners with "Good morning" or "Good afternoon" or risk gentle chiding. Black Bermudians are



quick to rebuke our failure to instill proper manners. Many local businesses are owned, not only staffed, by those of African descent. Though the cost of living is high, Bermuda's relatively stable, diversified economy results from its early dominance in tourism and, ironically, *lack* of independence; the island remains a British Overseas Territory. By the time we leave, our little chameleons have been retrained.

"Two boys were playing cricket on a hill above the attraction. You can see the spot where they first discovered the hole to the cave on your way out. Just follow the roosters," Harold says.

Roosters roam the island freely like bereft lovers, heedless of parental responsibilities.

Ever the entrepreneur, our older son says: "I bet they made a lot of money."

Over the fidgeting of others in our group, Harold relates a complex tangle of ownership disputes, adding at the end that the site is currently for sale.

In the US, people in stories are presumed white until declared otherwise. Politeness prevents me from asking what never occurs to my sons: what color were the boys? To Harold, they were Bermudian boys. Miniature cricketers. Following a small white ball down a hole. Later, we find out. They were black. It explains the dispute, to me anyway.

If a century ago, the split between being African and American represented a kind of schizophrenia, to be a black intellectual in our current moment means processing our identity in the context of persistent divisions based on class and education. Our reception from the people of Bermuda—the easy smiles, the open acceptance—certainly felt like cultural affirmation. As we move about the US, strangers, whether black, white, immigrant, or native, question the provenance of my intact heteronormative family. We don't fit the quotidian portrait of homegrown Negro. Instead, we are confused for any number of East African nationalities (Somali, Cameroonian, Ethiopian) and most often Caribbean. On Bermuda, no one asks: where are you from? We belong.

### Living Monuments

With the exception of Louisiana sugar cane plantations, slavery in the Caribbean colonies was harsher due to planters' tendency to work their slaves to death and replenish them with new arrivals. However, post-emancipation, blacks held the majority on the islands, whereas in the US, African Americans remained in the minority. As a result, West Indians accrued swifter access to civil rights and socioeconomic parity. Colonial wounds, however, continue to fester throughout the Caribbean, evident in class distinctions and the desire to hold onto privileges accorded to those with lighter skin, an inheritance writer Edward Braithwaite calls the "inner plantation."

In contrast, Jamaican-born Harlem Renaissance poet Claude McKay wrote of:

Aframericans who, long deracinated, were still rootless among phantoms and pale shadows, enfeebled by self-effacement before condescending patronage, social negativism and miscegenation.

Are we still more rootless than Caribbean blacks? Is that why my family and I find Bermuda so welcoming?

The locals smile as we shiver in our fleece on the beach. "We're *subtropical*," one of the hotel workers says. Meaning: it's never too hot or too cold. Caveat: the wind is always blowing. The sand is fine powder. The water too cool for swimming but fine for wading or watching longtails, the national bird, sway in and out. Our eight-year-old's boy-crush for the first few days of our stay has gone back to Massachusetts, but he falls in easily with another group of hotel kids. Our tween stays in his room. Counts his Magic cards. He doesn't speak the international language of boys.

I haven't forgotten about the whipping post. Later, at the Bermudian Heritage Museum, I ask about its elusive location in Sandys (pronounced Sands) Parish.

"Why, it is there; you have to know where to look," Maxime, the proprietress, says. She rattles off a series of rapid-fire questions: Did you pass

the police station? Did you go over the drawbridge? Was the sea on your right or your left? Ah, you found the Railway Trail. She provides no specific directives to help ground my search. I gaze wistfully at the blurry photo in the brochure. It's a phantom site.

The Bermudian Heritage Museum in Historic St. George at Bermuda's northeast tip resides in a former Friendly Society building. These organizations (similar to but more inclusive than the Freemasons) lobbied for the freedom of the *Enterprise's* human cargo. Unlike the collection of leg irons and other implements of torture in the slavery exhibit at the Dockyard, which we saw the first day, the museum has chosen to emphasize achievement. Maxime proudly tells us about limestone roofs. How the ingenuity of Bermudian architecture naturally filters the water through the white slats. She shows us the tools local artisans use to cut and shape rock. Only after she pinpoints this innovation does she gesture at the "small" exhibit on slavery hidden behind a curtain in an adjacent room. She prefers a narrative of ascent over descent. Maxime also doesn't like the Sally Bassett statue: "You can't see her face," she says.

It's true that the emphasis is on Bassett's bound body. Her visage is inaccessible; perhaps her sights are already set on *Ginen* (Africa or the spirit world), or she implores her ancestral spirits to save her—a witch's final plea. You can't tell if her expression is contorted with pain, blank with acceptance, or defiant to the end.

Why do some Bermudians reenact dunkings or willingly insert themselves in the stocks while others, like Maxime, train their eyes on the future? Each of the museum's rooms is filled with the relics of famous Bermudians, enslaved and unslaved. A sampling of who and what some black Bermudians choose to remember.

On the second floor of the museum, photocopies of plantation logs list slaves by name, age, and complexion: Patsy Rideout, 25 years, Yellow. Norris Brown, 16 years, Black. Wilma Littlefield, 12 years, Copper.

“What’s copper?” my younger son asks. “The price?”

I hold my arm next to his. “We’re copper.”

“Why would they need to know that?”

Hue was an important identifier. Here as elsewhere the enslaved population became quickly multiethnic. The earliest people of color were Native and African pearl divers from other parts of the West Indies. Subsequent waves of African captives from Haiti (following the Revolution, an influx of mulattoes were blamed for a rebellion) and the Portuguese colonies of the Azores and Cape Verdean islands joined the population. Successive insurrections caused ordinances to be passed against the insolence of the Negroes: slaves could not congregate; curfews were enforced. At one point, all free blacks were deported for promoting sedition.

### **Isle of Refuge?**

The best way to spy Gibbet Island, another stop on the ADHT, is to trespass. One day we took a detour off the Rail Trail to avoid the speeding traffic near Flatts Village, braving the “beware of dog” signs, to cross a wide expanse of springy Bermuda grass, kin to the thirsty lawns I grew up with in Los Angeles, to see the small, desolate rock in an aquamarine bay. Flatts is home to Bermuda’s internationally renowned aquarium. To our boys’ intense disappointment, the facility is under renovation. Presumably, the island’s extensive reef system and northern location make it impervious to hurricanes, and yet, in 2013, strong winds damaged the aquarium, as well as the Commissioner’s house in the Dockyard, where days before we roamed a vast courtyard presided over by Poseidon and his trident.

Though unmarked by a plaque, the name “Gibbet Island” recalls a punishment as gruesome as Bassett’s. In January 1754, a black slave named Quash was executed for the murder of his master. Sentenced to death by hanging in chains, according to historian Winslow Manley Bell (1920),

Quash was:

so tightly bound as just to be able to turn his head sufficiently to eat the flesh off his arms as far as he could reach with his teeth, and thus starved to death. His body hung there in chains until his bones fell on the earth below, while the birds built nest in his skull. . . . As late as 1898, the rusty chains were still to be seen.

We don't glimpse the chains, nor do we encounter the ferocious dog my older son feared would alert the authorities to our presence or drive us over the cliffs into the sea. Backtracking to Flatt's inlet, we take another route over a short bridge. What we do see: a school of thirteen giant parrotfish resembling moving brown rocks striated with turquoise. It is typical to glimpse one or two. The sight of so many attracts a crowd of runners and hikers to the bridge. The island, and what it took to view it, disappears.

Historically, the Atlantic Commons, which included the Carolina coast, forged tight bonds built on blood and trade. On a return trip to St. George, we find the tablet embossed with a bust of Joseph Rainey's image. It floats above a plaque marking "Barber's Alley," where his shop was located in the kitchen of Tucker House until 1866. A freed slave, he and his wife, Susan, escaped from the US mainland to Bermuda in 1862. They sat out the Civil War while running a barbershop in St. George. Rainey would return to the US during the Reconstruction era (1865–1877), where he would serve in Congress, as a state senator, and in other public service roles in the slow-to-heal nation. For Rainey, and the human cargo on the *Enterprise*, Bermuda was an isle of refuge, but for others, seeking to escape bondage, it was a prison of rock and wind bounded by a heartless sea. Watchtowers were erected throughout the island to spot fugitives. There's an ancient one near Somerset Bridge, which our bus, heavily rocking, had rumbled over during our first attempt to locate the allegedly adjacent whipping post.

The entire town of St. George—its public square, military fort, gardens, church, and graveyard—is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. I've seen slave graveyards before, in Charleston, in the Cane River region of Louisiana, but

the children have not. The burial ground adjacent to St. Peter's, a seventeenth-century church, served as the resting place for free and enslaved blacks. Rather than a site of sadness, it is a tranquil place of commemoration. The boys stand respectfully at the entrance, squinting at the faded engravings. They cautiously tiptoe between the tombstones, attempting to read the names aloud, asking about the lack of birth or death dates. They trace the UNESCO plaque with their fingers. Without it, you would not be able to tell who was white or black, free or enslaved. I resist the urge to slap their hands away. I, too, am fascinated by the variety of shapes and sizes, the angles at which the stones are pitched, some marked only by an engraved cross. A lone, crumbling bench indicates that this was a site for repose and contemplation. The humble partition with its plaque donated by St. George's Cricket Club holds more interest than the large, ornate tombs of eminent citizens nestled near the sanctuary. Unfortunately, not all the island's gravesites are so protected. In Tucker's Point, where compulsory eviction in the 1920s relocated Phaedra's grandmother and countless others to make way for development, a nineteenth-century graveyard still sits on the grounds of a private golf course.

Behind St. Peter's, we climb past the ruins of the unfinished church to St. Catherine's Beach. If the Atlantic's clear waters are haunted, what creeping ghosts lick my younger son's ankles as he splashes in low tide? His prepubescent joy pervades the salt-spattered air. This is the beach where the *Sea Venture* made landfall in 1609. How might history have been altered if the colonists had refused to continue on to Jamestown with provisions? Would the British have given up their colonial desires? Or at the very least, hesitated long enough for the indigenous population to mount a successful, collective defense?

The cataclysmic effect of the shipwreck on world history is chronicled everywhere on the island. Bermuda is an ecological and historical site of immense significance. So many world histories ignite at its center. Atlantic culture meets at this crossroads. It is one of the reasons Bermuda has been designated a world

heritage site. A replica of *Deliverance*, built from the *Sea Venture*'s wreckage, is "docked" in St. George's Square. We crawl all over it, listen to wax robots relate the trials of the colonists and William Strachey's oral history, which Shakespeare would plagiarize into *The Tempest*. The *Sea Venture*'s story counterbalances the *Enterprise*'s landing in Barr's Bay after British emancipation of Bermuda.

Sitting on St. Catherine's Beach, beneath the watchful stones of the Fort, I sense a timeless, transatlantic connectivity. The swaying palms and cedars recall Southern California's temperate Mediterranean climate. This continual sense of homecoming reminds me of what my husband says under his breath in mid-February or late March when the mercury drops below zero, as it did shortly before we boarded our plane in Milwaukee: "We were not supposed to be here."

I still have yet to set eyes on the whipping post, but we encounter a replica along with stocks in St. George's Square. With its smooth tan wood, the replica is deceptively innocuous: a short, thick pillar with curved iron handles on each side.

"Are you sure that's not a *hitching* post?" my husband asks, placing his hand on the rounded top.

"Like for ponies?" says our younger son.

It's easier to imagine horses rather than human beings chained in the square, but the thought does nothing to dislodge the ghostly image of its predecessor—wood weathered by fingernails and varnished with blood—from my mind. I shake my head, and point to the adjacent stocks. A matched set.

There is also the dunking stool jutting out over the harbor beside the half-scale model of the *Deliverance*. As in Puritan New England, women suspected of witchcraft or other mischief would be dropped into the purifying salt waters of the Atlantic, an early form of waterboarding.

Today, there are no reenactments. Instead, the stocks are undergoing renovations and repairs. My sons take advantage of this opportunity to climb all over the gruesome contraption. They smile as they slide their heads into its vice. The sight nauseates me, but I don't want to spoil their fun.

Following the trail of Atlantic slavery entails a certain level of jeopardy, but for those with ties of flesh and blood, the dangers are manifold. My skin carries the imprimatur of enslavement and witchery. Is radical empathy or transubstantiation worth the risk? A *Sankofa*-like experience—Haile Gerima’s film in which a model on a photo shoot at a “slave castle” is transported back to an antebellum plantation—has no appeal. What if something similar happens to me? To us? In Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, Sethe cautions her daughter that not only is her mother’s site of enslavement still animated by its horrible legacy, if she returns, “it’s going to always be there waiting for you.” That a place can lie in wait, replaying its traumatic event, is what is meant by the *spectral* south, the graveyard of the Atlantic, a haunted land and seascape. Dark tourism’s ghostly capital trades on events, both authentic and imagined. Morrison uses the term *rememory* to encapsulate what Sethe tells her daughter: “The picture is still there and what’s more, if you go there—you who never was there—if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there waiting for you.”

I should know better than to place my family in such crosshairs. Racism is always at the ready. This is not superstition or folklore. It’s what it means to belong to a diaspora. My skin and my refusal to look away from Sally while she burns activates radical empathy. As Morrison’s novel bears out, there are also hazards in the avoidance and suppression of traumatic legacies. If we grasp the boomerang of history, with empathy, in consciousness, we can move forward. Such a journey is always worth undertaking.

### Jeffrey’s Cave

I’m clutching a PDF of the ADHT brochure in one hand and my younger son’s sweaty palm in the other. We’re back near Flatt’s Village again. We go over hills and skid down trails marked only by indentions in the leaves. In the mid-eighteenth century, a slave named Jeffrey escaped and hid in a cave for a year. This is the oral history. Food was lowered down to him through a hole. The



literature tells us that Jeffrey survived for ninety days somewhere in the Spittal Pond Nature Reserve.

As we seek Jeffrey's hiding place, our bodies inhabit any number of historical actors: the desperate fugitive, the brave Samaritan bringing sustenance, a member of the Watch authorized to track down escapees. The nature preserve allows us to time travel across two centuries.

"What did Jeffrey eat?" my younger son asks.

"Not hot cross buns and fish cakes," the older son replies, though the question is directed at me.

Bermudian foodways are cosmopolitan and continental. With the exception of the dark fish stew sold at the gas station outside our hotel, indigenous cuisine is hard to find. The hotel serves the soup with sugared rum and chili oil. I prefer the gas station's. I eat it at ten a.m. out of a Styrofoam cup, with saltines. Hotel fare tends to be international or decidedly British. Fish and chips. Tea promptly at three p.m. We often cut our excursions short to make it back before the scones and miniature cakes disappear. My husband watches us in amused disgust when we lick crumbs and curd from our fingers.

"You are all such Anglophiles," he says.

Because it's Easter week, twice we've had hot cross buns—sweet dough scored with a crucifix then baked plump and golden—and codfish cakes, battered and fried. The salty-sweet concoction works for breakfast, lunch, or dinner.

"Mommy," my younger son tugs out of my grip. "What happened to Jeffrey?"

Here's the part of the story I don't want to tell. The question is laced with hope. He wants Jeffrey to have flagged down a pirate ship and sailed away to freedom. He wants this cave to have been a shelter and not a prison, a leap and not an oubliette. I make it a practice not to deliberately lie to my children.

"They caught him, eventually," I say. "We don't know what happened."

But I know he is thinking of Sally Bassett aflame. He is remembering

the smell of newly sanded stocks. He knows what happened to Jeffrey without being told.

Pure luck leads us to an indentation of granite half a mile from Portuguese Rock, where an early colonialist carved a year—1543—into a cliffside. In order to see Jeffrey’s abode from the inside, it’s necessary and reasonable for my husband to climb down said hole. I want to follow, but remember: we have no rope; we are not spelunkers. We are on the trail of ghosts. What will happen to our boys if we can’t climb out? We are miles into a nature preserve with no international cell plan.

In the digital photos my husband takes, the inside of the cave is striated, surprisingly roomy. There are no commemorative UNESCO plaques. The view: an opening to the sea the shape of Texas. The water is anything but calm. Did Jeffrey watch it shift from silvered glass to creamy whitecaps surfed by longtails? Maybe he spied a ship and wondered about its colors. For a fugitive on an island of this size, it was only a matter of time.

The UNESCO and African Diaspora Trail plaques have begun to create the kind of markers Toni Morrison wished for when she was writing *Beloved*:

There is no place you or I can go, to think about or not think about, to summon the presences of, or recollect the absences of slaves. . . . There is no suitable memorial, or plaque, or wreath, or wall, or park, or skyscraper lobby. There’s no 300-foot tower, there’s no small bench by the road. . . . And because such a place doesn’t exist . . . the book had to (The World, 1989).

As of yet, no plaque designates Jeffrey’s hideout, but I often come back to my photograph of his ocean view from the cave. What scenes might he have imagined to fill the hours between food drops? With few exceptions, my photographs of ADHT sites are empty of people. I’ve come to think of this unintentional cropping as a rupture in time, a displacement of contemporary culture. Photographing a site without human subjects allows that space to coexist in the present and the past simultaneously. As Teju Cole notes when he considers Glenna Gordon’s series on the personal items of Nigerian schoolgirls abducted by Boko Haram, “the human victims are themselves missing, not

simply excluded.” In the one or two photos where a family member appears in the monument’s shadow, their presence startles me. It’s as if they have fallen through time.

I am relieved to have no photos of the whipping post. It remains a phantom, but I worry it might also be a portal. In which case the replica will not only suffice, it is preferable.

### **Kite**

The forty-mile-per-hour wind subsides on Good Friday. Away with raincoats, out come swimsuits as we join the locals and tourists alike for “Kite Day.” There will be a contest on the beach at Horseshoe Bay, jerk chicken, and Gombey dancing.

In the hotel lounge the night before, we craft a handmade kite with Mr. Roberts, an artisan and master kite maker. Ostensibly, kite making is a children’s activity, but after fifteen minutes of instruction, they abandon us for Xboxes. We toil with the other parents vying for Mr. Roberts’s attention.

“When I was a boy,” Mr. Roberts says, “this was what we did for entertainment.”

It is a point of pride to have the most intricate, ascendant frames, most vivid colors, and longest tail. Hours are devoted to design and assembly. He shakes his head at the children crowded around screens of varying sizes. Guiltily, my husband and I work harder to cut precise shapes from wisps of tissue paper, taking turns administering minuscule amounts of glue and then lining up behind other parents for Mr. Roberts to string the frame, something no one feels confident doing.

I suspect our discomfort is with the ephemeral nature of the kite. I fear our kite is too lovely to be aerodynamic. What we want is to wrap it securely and bring it home through airport security. But the kite’s life span is a single day. Its destiny is to take its virgin flight and crash, like ours will on the rocky shore. The detritus of the holiday. It does not exist off island.

Local lore credits the Bermudian tradition of kite flying to a priest who

was concerned that parishioners stayed away from the church on Good Friday. A day devoted to flying kites from the hills, cliffs, and shoreline is a day spent closer to God. Kites made in the shape of the cross, like the crusty embossment atop a sweet roll, commemorate the crucifixion.

Just before we leave for Horseshoe Bay, the concierge presents the boys with plastic kites in the shape of a vampire bat and Spiderman. Flimsy and cheap, these seem the better bet for getting aloft. Our kite's tail is over five feet long and made from ripped sheets. We disagree about how to transport our delicate flag. Will it fly? In the end, we decide to take it along wrapped in a garbage bag; we cram onto a pink bus with tourists and natives holding their own kites. My husband believes we should have left ours at the hotel.

"Do you think we'll win the contest?" My older son is ever eager to assert supremacy.

It is a collective effort. I hold the kite high, my back to the waves, feet planted in wet sand while my husband runs toward the cliffs. When he gives the sign, I let it go. After several tries, including a very awkward detangling from an Australian couples' pterodactyl, we get it up.

While my younger son plays hide-and-seek in a crystalline cove with a cobalt parrotfish the size of a tomcat, my eldest and I climb the rocks overlooking the bay. Three islanders carry a kite made in the image of the black and silver flag of Sri Lanka. It is easily ten feet long and six feet wide. They pause and preen for photos. We can't believe they'll get it airborne.

Finally, from the heights, we see it, and ours, soaring above the pink blush of the sand.

"There it is," my older son says. It's a humming magenta-and-green octagon; it's a longtail twisting in the breeze.

