When the West India Regiment decamped,
a band of wee-droppers congregated
keening in the rain outside Duppy Gate.

These ladies made moan and called after
departing lorries: O do not, do not forget
we the fair Jamaican girls

you romanced at those Saturday night
soirees at Up Park Camp; under the argent
Jamaican moon we silver spooned.

Then you pledged that you’d take us home
to motherland there to meet your mam
and da in some shire of England.

You promised as you took us to camp beds,
but now you are departed, where O where
will we find suitable husbands?

We’ll have to make alliances with itinerant
foreigners going native, be rejected by Aid
workers who like girls thick — dark as molasses.

We’ll have to flee to source spouses in Europe.
We will never speak of what occurred over
in Europe. We’ll just return to local shores
and rent-a-dread.
We who sat out Black is Beautiful, appalled by independent tie-head sufferers and God forbid, a black prime minister!

Will have to be counted with the common herd. We will perforce have to acknowledge our more than just a wee drop of black blood.
Quilt — Jamaica 1838

This lady has asked me to record that no one less than Saint Anne, patron saint of seamstresses, appeared in a vision and handed her a long-eyed golden needle, a spool of silver thread, and commanded her to stitch a quilt for Missus Queen herself.

And I think how since I quit the estate all I sleep on is cold ground with rockstone pillow under my head. I think to myself how a scribe like me could use a quilt to fold and function as rug when I prostrate myself; one I could fashion as a bolster for my neck, when I sit under a tree to meditate and receive inspiration from leafy ancestral spirits. I would take care of it. Wash it. Shield it from scorch stare of hot sun so it would not fade out. Darn it when I rip it, save it for the day I can broad-off like missus across my feather bed. One day, one day I will purchase a feather bed. You don’t believe me? You wait and see. Be that as it may, I almost said when this lady approached me and requested that I write her story for she is not strong in the literacy department —

this lady who appears to me like she’s bound for Newcastle with a load of excess coal — I am certain her Highness is not short of fine bed linen and such delights up there in her royal mansion that is grander by far than any Jamaican great house.

She surely hath quilts of silver and gold; embossed, festooned, inlaid, arrayed with precious stones; what would she want with your humble local needlework? But a still small voice said, what if this woman really believes that Charity never faileth?
What if Saint Anne, really did appeareth, and sayeth she is to maketh a thing of beauty to be a joy forever to a queen? A thing to cut a dash across her gold post most splendidous bed — Bless the many millions from the Gold Coast whose labour produced that wagga wagga.

So I say to her, I will record for posterity how you skillfully joined up all manner of leftover cotton, second-hand silk and satin, nappy velvet, and piece-a-piece of all and sundry fabric, and seam them into two quilts for which you will receive abundant blessings in return.

And having committed this to paper, the payment I ask for now I’m done is that you give one to me, your womanmanuensis.