

PATRICIA JABBEH WESLEY

Coming Home

for Besie-Nyesuah

Besie runs towards me, arms wide, despite the crowd
at the airport, she's screaming, "Mo-mm-m-m-ie,"

and everybody stares. Arms around me, my daughter
holds me tight, and we almost fall beside her suitcase

I have just lifted off the belt. At nineteen, she is now
a woman, tall, slender, her soft, small arms and fair skin

remind me of Ma Wadeh, my mother-in-law. In a moment,
I am looking her all over, counting to see if she is not

too skinny for a girl her age. Every girl becomes woman
when she can come home, knowing how like her mother

she is becoming—a woman like all the other women
before her. "This is Pittsburgh," I say, "isn't it beautiful?"

We're driving past houses in the distant hills along
Pittsburgh's winding freeway, houses that lean and rush

past us as we also rush past them. Everything here leans
sideways, almost free, as if to fall into the merging rivers

down below. My college-age children are coming home
to Pennsylvania, where we are surrounded by hills

and valleys and cliffs, and the university where my
new students speak with an accent they refuse to admit.

“So this is home now?” Besie says as if to herself
while I turn into our new driveway in a neighborhood

of rolling hills and brick houses overlooking one another.
“We are the first black on this property,” I say. But this

is going to be home—all these valleys and green, green hills
will be home. “But this is Pennsylvania,” Besie says, as doors

bang and everyone rushes out to welcome her home after
too many months away. “We are all trying to find home,”

I say, as my words become lost in the din of screaming
children and my husband, lifting Besie up in the air

and swinging her around in circles. All my children
are under one roof again, I tell myself, for the first

time, all my children are under one roof in our new state.
But Michigan is that ghost that stands at the outskirts

of your new town, where your memory refuses to shut out
so many years, and that year when you arrived with

nothing and looking to find home among strangers,
where the cold, cold winds became a new friend.

Your second chance at finding home, now becoming
memory too. Michigan haunts the holidays, another

ghost to carry around among all the other ghosts we are seeking to undo. In Monrovia, families will gather

and discuss the many years we have been away from home. Monrovia is the true ghost story of lost peoples

in the Diaspora. In America, we are the new nomads, the wanderers coming home or looking to make

home or running away from home among new people, and one by one, our children, who will never know

where we really come from, are leaving only to come back to decorative lights, Christmas trees, holiday

music, and turkey baking in the oven, stuffing, and pies. We are becoming new people, I tell myself.

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