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# When the Wanderers Come Home

Patricia Jabbeh Wesley

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WHEN THE WANDERERS COME HOME

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# WHEN THE WANDERERS COME HOME

*Patricia Jabbeh Wesley*

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*This book is dedicated to the memory of my father, Moses C. Jabbeh, Kwadi Chee, for a lifetime of inspiration, love, and guidance. You are the hero of my life. I celebrate you always.*

*We are characters now other than before  
The war began, the stay-at-home unsettled  
By taxes and rumor, the looter for office  
And wares, fearful everyday the owners may return, . . .”*

—John Pepper Clark Bekeremo

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to War”

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Clothes”



# BOOK I

Coming Home

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# So I Stand Here

They say thresholds are meant to keep

the outsider out, the insider, in. Crickets  
forever creeping along walls, along the edges

of things. You must first lift your right foot,  
and then the left, and then enter the hut

before the kola nut is served, before  
the spiced pepper is offered, and the water

from the stream, handed to you. This is  
the way of things, the way of life, clay to clay,

your hand holds not just a cup of water,  
but the source of life. Tradition. After that,

the outsider is now an insider, but everywhere  
I go, my country people have become

a different people. So, I stand here,  
an outsider, at the doorpost. Do not tell me

that these corrugated old dusty roads  
have emerged of themselves out of the war.

Or that the new songs these strangers sing  
in this now strange country of ours are

from the time before the bullets. Do not tell  
me that the kola nut you served me

will answer all of the questions that linger  
in my soul. Do not tell me that I belong  
to this new people. I have wandered away  
too long, my kinsmen. I have wandered so far,  
my feet no longer know how to walk the old  
paths we used to walk. I do not know these  
people, birthed from the night's passing  
of lost ghosts. I do not know these people  
who have so sadly emerged out of the womb  
of war after the termite's feasting.  
My kola nut has lost its taste, and the spiced  
pepper, now, with a new spice. I am too  
impure to meet my ancestors, and the gourd  
of water I have just fetched from Ngalun  
weighs heavily upon my head. I stand  
at the threshold, my kinsmen, come and help  
me over the doorpost that the termites  
have eaten. I do not have the hands to greet  
my ancestors. I do not have the hands  
to greet my kinswomen, and the hand with  
which I take hold of the kola nut is shriveled  
by travel. The kola nut you served me

is no longer bitter, oh come, my kinswomen,  
the horn blower has lost his voice. But they

tell me that the horn blower does not need  
his voice to blow the horn to let me in.