

PATRICIA JABBEH WESLEY

You Wouldn't Let Me Adopt My Dog

A Poem for Ade-Juah

“Mom, you wouldn't let me adopt a dog in my dream,”
my daughter tells me. “Really? Go back to your
dream, my child, and adopt that dog,” I say.

Tend to it, humor it, take it to the vet, clip its toe nails.
Give it antibiotics and let it run wild on our lawn.
Allow it to pull at the neighbors' flowers, let it dig
up their wooden fence, knock down other people's
flower pots, give it a name, and let it
roll under your comforter. Let it eat out of your bowl.

Tell the dog that its Grandmother loves it very much.
She loves it as long as it remains in the dream world
of uneven spaces, so improperly laid out,
the dreamer cannot bring back into the real world
what belongs to the dream world.
May your dog grow old and tired, beyond dog years,
and may it give birth to many dog babies
to help populate the dream universe.

I want to squat when I greet your dog,
and let it lick my ring finger clean.
I want your dog to linger upon my doorstep
while I stroke its head. I want to populate

your dream world with myself even as a dog
that I'm so afraid of, lives and leaps.
Go back, my sweet Ade, and tell the dog how
welcome it is, no matter what kind of dog it is.

But let it know that my knees now hurt; my back
wants to give way after too many babies,
and last night, my hip began to send new signals
my way, as if I were a bag of electric waves,
trying to tell the world I'm done.
Tell your dog that I do not have the résumé
to tend an American dog. Tell him I am still
African, in the way that my mother woke up
each day, wondering where the food
for us children would come from.

Tell your dog that I love dogs, but I wonder
if the child somewhere in my home village had
a bowl of dry rice and palm oil to eat this morning.
Tell him my father still needs me to send money
to feed a house full of motherless children
who have taken to living with him after the war.
Tell the dog that if I become rich and famous,

I'll let you cross over the threshold of the dream
world, into the real and bring him home
to meet his new family, where his Grandmother
stands over the kitchen sink, wet hands
and eyes, listening to Ade-Juah as if the things
that plague this world were not much
bigger than a dream, as if the life
of one small dog were larger than life.

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