

# Home

Lourdes Dolores Follins

“Go home,” the Voice said calmly to me. I’d been thinking about where to go for an upcoming vacation and She’d been whispering this to me for days. Each time, I shook my head as if trying to shake wrinkles out of two-week-old bedsheets. She is Intuition, Ancestor Spirit, or whatever I feel like calling her on any particular day.

“But I don’t *wanna* go home,” I insisted. It was true; I didn’t want to go Home because home is Staten Island, NY, a White-majority, parochial borough where my Blackness always seems like an affront.

“Go *home*,” the Voice said firmly. I suppose She thinks it would be good for me, thinks it is what I need. She *always* knows what I need, always knows what is best for me—but sometimes, I still ignore her.

“I don’t want to go home,” I protested. And then, I cried. Home isn’t a place I like to think about often because the thought of going Home makes me weep. Home is not the land or the buildings on it; it’s all the people I know and knew there, and the neighborhoods I moved through before I fled Home twenty-seven years ago when I was twenty-three.

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Home is a place of pain. A place where I made myself small and always hid. A place where a thirteen-year-old version of me wept in a sturdy, dark brown, wooden wardrobe when I found out that White male classmates bet to see how far one of them could get with me. A place where mice lived in the walls and tormented me day and night. A place where every autumn meant large sheets of barely opaque plastic taped over windows with haphazardly placed duct tape. A place where as a dark-skinned, working-class Black girl I was always both very visible and invisible. A place where no

one except my mother and stepfather expected much from me in school. A place where nothing I did really mattered to anyone. A place where I didn't even belong to those to whom I belonged. A place of terror, a place of silence, a place of constant longing for what other children I knew seemed to have—a place.

Home was a place where things were not in Black and White--except when they were. A place where family meant everything and absolutely nothing. A place where your Mom wasn't your stepbrothers' momma, but their Daddy was yours because yours didn't want you or your momma anymore. A place where your blended family wasn't blended and where the lines were blurred—except when they weren't, when there were hands on your six-year-old body, in places where they weren't supposed to be. A place where your mother and stepfather loved you in their silent, inaudible way and worked long hours to provide for you, to put a roof over your head, but failed to physically protect you from the boys and other men of the family, of the world. A place where family quietly loved you, but didn't think to protect you from or talk to you about the inevitability of anti-Black racism and misogyny.

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Home was growing up living in a constant state of fear and a world of silence because Everyone loved you and White strangers thought you were so “cute”, but No one never wanted to know what was inside your head or your heart. No one wanted to know how school was. No one wanted to know that your classmates liked you enough, but not enough to not call you colorist names and do things to your twelve-year-old Black girl body that not just broke, but shattered your bones and spirit forever.

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Home was never biological parents, stepparents, stepbrothers, a half-sister, grandparents, aunts, uncles, or cousins. Home was a place of harm. Home was not safe/ty. Home was not home.

So, you had no home, not even inside yourself. When you were a young adult, Home was in your lovers—until it wasn't anymore.

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It's not until decades later that you realize that Home has always been you and God and nature, and sometimes, friends who know your heart and your spirit. For most of your life, your home has been outside of Home. Now, Home is your God, your Orishas, and your tribe of Eggun—when you let yourself lean on them. You've never been able to trust that People can be Home for you, so it's difficult to whole-heartedly believe that God, Orishas, and Eggun—entities that cannot always be seen—can be your home, can be leaned on, can be trusted. But time and time again, when you let yourself lean on them, they show up in ways that People do not. They become, they are your Home.

Lourdes Dolores Follins (she/her) is a Black queer femme who comes from a long line of intrepid women and working-class strivers. She comfortably straddles the worlds of academic and creative nonfiction. When Lourdes Dolores isn't writing, she's working as a psychotherapist with QTIPOC and kinky people in New York City. Her favorite bird is the blue jay.