

WHERE DO  
BLACK GIRLS  
GO  
TO  
CRY?

A Memoir

by

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# Where Do Black Girls Go To Cry?

## Chapter 1

### The Rescue

The first thing I noticed about Monica was her shoes. Not the fact that she'd appeared in the doorway of my hospital room at 2 a.m., or that she somehow knew my name, or even that she was the first Black woman I'd seen since the ambulance brought me here six hours ago. No, what I noticed were her shoes. Butter-soft leather oxfords in a purple so deep, it was almost black, with creases that said she'd walked a thousand miles in them and would walk a thousand more.

The hospital room was standard psychiatric ward. Industrial beige walls designed not to soothe but to provide no sharp edges for harm. Fluorescent lights hummed at a frequency meant to keep you awake, a constant buzz that burrowed into your skull after enough hours. The single window had safety glass so thick everything outside looked clouded, dreamlike. You could see shapes moving but never clearly enough to make out details.

I'd been staring at that window for three hours, watching shadows drift past. Nurses doing rounds. Doctors checking charts. Other patients shuffling from room to bathroom and back.

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The whole floor had a rhythm: footsteps echoing, doors opening and closing with pneumatic hisses, muffled conversations through thin walls, occasional crying that nobody acknowledged.

The bed was regulation hard, the sheets industrial thin, the pillow flat as paper. Everything designed to be functional, washable, replaceable. Nothing designed to be comfortable. Because comfort wasn't the point. The point was keeping you alive for seventy-two hours. What happened after that was someone else's problem.

I'd learned the patterns already. The night shift was quieter. They performed fewer checks and there were longer gaps between interruptions. If I could make it to 6 a.m., they'd start the morning routines, and I would be one day closer to discharge. One day closer to being released back into the same life that broke me.

Except I had nowhere to go.

That was the part they never addressed in psychiatric holds. They could stabilize your medications, make sure you didn't hurt yourself, connect you with outpatient resources. But they couldn't give you a place to live. Couldn't fix your family. Couldn't make your problems disappear. They just kept you breathing long enough to face them again.

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I was wearing hospital socks with the sticky grip on the bottom, the kind that say FALL RISK in all caps, like the universe needed to label what I already knew.

"Rochelle Bampi," she said, not quite a question.

She had a folder in one hand and a large tote bag slung over her shoulder. The bag had letters embroidered on it: IHC.

I didn't respond. Responding meant engaging. Engaging meant explaining why a thirty-three-year-old woman with a six-year-old son had just spent the night in a mental health crisis unit after her father called the police. After her sister tried to beat her in the driveway while her son screamed. After she'd loaded everything she owned into an '04 Cobalt and driven toward the highway with no plan except to make it stop.

"I'm not here to counsel you," Monica said, pulling up the guest chair, the one the intake officer had used earlier to inform me I'd be placed on a seventy-two-hour psychiatric hold.

"And I'm not from the hospital." She advised.

She settled into the chair like she had all the time in the world, crossed one ankle over her knee, and waited.

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I stared at the ceiling tiles. Someone had written something in pencil on one of them, too faint to read. I wondered how many people had lain in this bed, staring at that same tile, trying to make out the words.

"My name is Monica," she continued, unbothered by my silence. "I'm part of an organization called Intentional Homies. Someone who cares about you very much asked me to find you."

"Intentional Homies sounds like a high school club," I told her. "I don't know anyone who," I didn't finish.

"Claudia. Your nurse from the ER a while back."

Monica opened the folder, scanned something, closed it again. "She works with us. She's been keeping an eye on you."

That stopped me.

The thought that someone had been paying attention, that I wasn't as invisible as I felt, made something crack in my chest.

"I don't need help," I said, which was such an obvious lie that Monica actually laughed.

"Baby girl," she said, and something in the way she said it, not condescending, just, matter of fact, made my throat tighten.

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"You're on a psychiatric hold wearing hospital socks at two in the morning. I promise you, this is what needing help looks like."

I turned my face toward the wall. The tears came hot and fast, the kind I'd been holding back since officer Schwartz had loaded me into the ambulance while my son watched.

Schwartz had been kind too. That was what made it worse somehow. If he'd been rough, if he'd treated me like a criminal or a problem, I could have held onto my anger, used it as armor. But he'd been gentle. Sad, even.

"Miss Bampi," he'd said, "I can't keep coming out here. You know that, right?"

This was the third time. Third time my family had called the police because they didn't know what else to do with me. Third time Schwartz specifically had responded because he'd requested my address be added to his patrol route. The last time, I was fighting with my sister in the middle of the driveway.

"I know," I whispered.

"Do you? Because next time, I might not be able to just talk you down. Next time, I might have to" He stopped, looked at Roan standing by my father's truck, face streaked with tears. "That boy needs his mother."

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"I know."

"Then let me take you somewhere they can help.  
Please."

He'd said please. A police officer, asking permission to help. That was when I'd realized how bad things had gotten. When even the cops were treating me like I might break at any moment.

I nodded. Let him guide me to the ambulance. Let him tell Roan I'd be okay, that I just needed to talk to some doctors. Let him radio ahead to the hospital so they'd be ready.

"Thank you," I managed before the doors closed.

He just shook his head. "Take care of yourself, Miss Bampi. That kid needs you."

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"Where's Roan?" I managed.

"With your parents. He's safe."

"They hate me."

"Maybe. Or maybe they just don't know what to do with you."

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Monica reached into her bag and pulled out a packet of tissues, set them on the bed beside me. "Either way, that's not your problem right now."

I grabbed a tissue, pressed it against my eyes. "What's my problem, then?"

"Your problem," Monica said, "is that you're trying to save yourself alone. And it's killing you."

The words landed like a physical blow.

Because she was right. I'd been trying to save myself alone for as long as I could remember. Since I was six years old and learned that some violations don't get reported. That some pain you swallow because saying it out loud makes it real, makes it something people have to respond to, makes you a problem nobody wants to deal with.

Since I was twelve and moved to a neighborhood where I didn't belong, where every day was survival, where asking for help meant admitting you couldn't handle it.

Since I was eighteen and left for college with scholarship money I'd hustled from every source I could find, knowing if I failed there was no safety net, no family bail-out, just me and whatever I could scrape together.

I'd built my whole life on the foundation of "I can do this alone."

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Because depending on people gave them power to hurt you. Because asking for help felt like weakness. Because strong Black women don't crumble, don't complain, don't need anyone.

Except I was crumbling. Had been for years. Had held it together with spit and prayer and sheer stubborn refusal to admit I couldn't handle it. And look where that got me, psychiatric hold, hospital socks, son with my parents who may or may not hate me, no home to return to.

Monica was right. It was killing me.

Not metaphorically. Literally. My body was breaking down, the stress manifesting as physical illness. My mind was fracturing. The suicidal ideation, the intrusive thoughts, the constant calculation of whether today was the day I stopped fighting.

And for what? Pride? Principle? The stubborn belief that I should be able to fix myself?

Maybe there was another way. Maybe asking for help wasn't weakness. Maybe accepting that I couldn't do it alone wasn't failure.

Maybe Monica was right.

The thought terrified me. Because accepting help meant being vulnerable. Meant admitting I'd been wrong about everything.

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Meant opening myself up to people who could leave, could hurt me, could confirm every fear I had about being too broken to fix.

But staying alone meant dying. That much was clear.

So maybe it was time to try something different.

The words had landed like a physical blow. I wanted to argue. To tell her she didn't know me, didn't know what I'd been through, didn't understand how hard I'd been trying.

But I was so tired.

"I can't do this anymore," I whispered.

"I know."

"I don't know how to fix it."

"I know that too."

I looked at her then, really looked at her. She was older than me, mid-forties, maybe. Natural hair, cut low and shaped with precision. No makeup except a dark lip. Silver hoops in her ears. A wedding band on her left hand and a ring with purple stones on her right. She wore all black except for a purple silk scarf draped around her shoulders.

She looked like someone who'd survived something.

"What do you want from me?" I asked.

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"Nothing you're not ready to give." She pulled a business card from her pocket and placed it on the bedside table. "But I want you to know that when you're ready, not if, when, we'll be there."

"We?"

"The Homies." She stood, slinging her bag back over her shoulder. "Women and other humans who've been where you are. Those who made it out. Women who don't believe in leaving other women behind."

She moved toward the door, then paused.

"One more thing, Rochelle. That note you gave your son, the one that said you weren't strong enough?"

My breath caught.

"You're wrong. You're still here. That means you're stronger than you think." She tapped the doorframe twice. "Get some rest. Someone will check on you in the morning."

And then she was gone.

I picked up the card. It was simple: purple text on cream cardstock.

INTENTIONAL HOMEIES

When you're ready to stop surviving and start living.

On the back, someone had written in purple ink:  
*You deserve a ninth life. -M.*

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I tucked the card under my pillow and closed my eyes.

For the first time in weeks, I slept.