



# They Tell Me of a Home: A Novel (Tommy Lee Tyson)

*Daniel Black*

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Twenty-eight-year-old protagonist Tommy Lee Tyson steps off the Greyhound bus in his hometown of Swamp Creek, Arkansas—a place he left when he was eighteen, vowing never to return. Yet fate and a Ph.D. in black studies force him back to his rural origins as he seeks to understand himself and the black community that produced him. A cold, nonchalant father and an emotionally indifferent mother make his return, after a ten-year hiatus, practically unbearable, and the discovery of his baby sister's death and her burial in the backyard almost consumes him. His mother watches his agony when he discovers his sister's tombstone, but neither she nor other family members is willing to disclose the secret of her death. Only after being prodded incessantly does his older brother, Willie James, relent and provide Tommy Lee with enough knowledge to figure out exactly what happened and why. Meanwhile, Tommy's seventy-year-old teacher—lying on her deathbed—asks him to remain in Swamp Creek and assume her position as the headmaster of the one-room schoolhouse. He refuses vehemently and she dies having bequeathed him her five thousand-book collection in the hopes that he will change his mind. Over the course of a one-week visit, riddled with tension, heartache, and revelation, Tommy Lee Tyson discovers truths about his family, his community, and his undeniable connection to rural Southern black folk and their ways.

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