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A Serving of Imaginative Tales"
by Steven Barnes, Tananarive Due, and
Brandon Massey**

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Digital Jambalaya A Serving of Imaginative Tales

by Steven Barnes, Tananarive Due, and Brandon Massey

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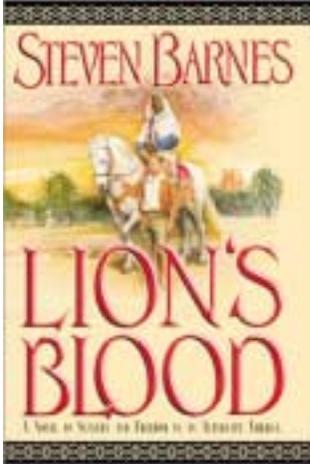
Digital Jambalaya A Serving of Imaginative Tales

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Steven Barnes
LION'S BLOOD
www.lionsblood.com

Lion's Blood: A Novel of Slavery and Freedom in an Alternate America



1864, The Old South. A world of masters and slaves, with one important difference: in this world, “America” was colonized by Islamic Africa, not Christian Europe. Kai is a young African noble meeting the challenges of power and faith. Aidan is an Irish slave obsessed with freedom. Their fates intertwine in a world torn by passion and conflict, the world of *Lion's Blood*.

A Warner Hardcover, In stores February 2002!

Here's an exclusive excerpt from LION'S BLOOD:

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Cetshwayo's old hunting injury prevented him from riding, but his twin sons Keefah and Darbul wouldn't have missed a hunt for a fistful of Alexanders. So as the sun dipped low above the kraal, Kai and seven highborn men, Zulus and Abyssinian alike, gathered their restless mounts in a mesquite flat abutting a conifer woodland. A dozen lean, alert Zulus accompanied them afoot.

The lead hunter was Shaka Zulu himself, a giant of a man who rode like a centaur. He raised his brawny arms--an ornate spear on one hand, a hunting bow in the other and a quiver on his back--and screamed to the moonless sky. “Let the hunt begin!”

Like Darbul and Keefah, the unmounted warriors were lean, muscular, agile men, trained

from infancy to be athletes on a par with any in the world. They gripped short stabbing *umkhonto* with elongated steel blades. Kai recalled Malik's sober evaluation of Zulu skill: "Avoid close quarter combat if there is any chance at all."

"And if I cannot?"

"Then consign your soul to Allah and prepare to enter Paradise. Just do your best to ensure you reach those gates together."

Abu Ali, Ali and Kai carried rifles as well as spears. Despite her pleas, Elenya remained behind at Cetshwayo's mansion. On a normal hunt the Wakil might have considered allowing her to accompany them. She rode as well as Kai, but on a hunt such as this, Abu Ali wouldn't consider it. "Why can Nandi go?" Elenya had pouted.

Cetshwayo himself had overheard that last and had laughed heartily after Elenya stalked out of the room. "In the old country, Nandi would not ride to the hunt," he sighed. "But this New World gives girls airs. What can I say? I can't control her any longer." He dug his elbow into Kai's ribs hard enough to make the boy chuff air. "I wish you better luck!"

Shaka's white teeth shone in the torchlight. "Only here and on the battlefield do I feel so alive."

Abu Ali pulled up next to him. Kai's family rode Cetshwayo's mounts, specially bred hunting stallions of imposing strength and size. Kai's seemed responsive to a feather touch of his knees, and Abu Ali already rode his as if he had raised the monster from a colt.

Abu Ali glanced doubtfully at Shaka's spear. "Can you really make the kill with such a weapon?"

Shaka's broad, scarred face glowed with amusement. "You had best hope so, my friend."

Distantly, there came the mournful wail of the hunting horn.

Shaka grew ruminative. "We bring the calves five thousand miles and raise them here, that we might honor the ways of our ancestors. He dies today. Perhaps he will claim one of us as well. Haiiii!"

With the suddenness of a lightning stroke he wheeled his horse about, as if sensing something that the others had missed completely. Abruptly, out of the brush not three dozen cubits away charged two hundred *sep* of the most fearsome creature Kai had ever seen in his life. Its black horns looked as if they could punch holes in steel, its breath snorted from its broad wet nostrils in clouds of condensation, its hooves furrowed the earth.

Savannah Buffalo. Magnificent, and the most dangerous game animal on the African continent. Crafty, powerful, and fast, the buffalo had killed more hunters than lions and

leopards combined, and had no natural predators--save men like Shaka Zulu.

Abu Ali's face went grim, and he reined his horse closer to Ali. "They are insane," he whispered. "Hold back a bit. Give Shaka and his men the honor of first contact."

"Gladly." Even gallant Ali looked unnerved.

Kai was still formulating his answer when Nandi rode past them. Her tan riding pants were unadorned, as simply functional as any of the men's. Somehow, the garb merely enhanced her sensuality.

As she passed Kai she spurred her steed and grinned back at him.

As the very wind of her passage ruffled his face, Kai felt her call: primal and wild and stronger than he had anticipated. He felt dizzied. "You would have me marry into this family, father?" Kai called to Abu Ali. "They are all mad." *And perhaps I am as well*, he thought. "Hai!"

Kai spurred his own horse forward into the fray.

Ali laughed. "Allah, preserve us! I think the boy is in love." And raced after his younger brother.

##

The footmen's shielded, gas-burning lanterns probed the darkness, but deep patches of shadow remained in the forest. Death lurked within them.

Shaka, his nephews and footmen worked forward in a practiced arc, clearing one segment of grass after another. The buffalo seemed to have disappeared.

Kai's heart was in his throat. How could so large a beast vanish so completely? Twice he had seen the buffalo erupt out of shadows, and the mounted Zulus had scattered, hooting, as its horns came within digits of their horses. Insanity! Worse yet, they treated it almost like a game. Almost. These men were in the finest, highest physical condition he had ever witnessed. Clearly, they were competing with each other not only physically, but in display of courage. And Nandi was right in the thick of it. What manner of man could ever control such a woman?

There! Their prey had raised up again, and snorted as it charged. One of Shaka's footmen thrust at the beast with a spear, and it wheeled, hitting the man from the side. This time, the hunter was unable to spin out of the way, and the horn pierced his ribs. With a despairing wail, the footman collapsed bleeding into the tall grass.

Two more men veered in, jabbing, and the buffalo turned. Shaka galloped back in. "Hold!" he cried. "He is mine!"

Deferentially, the footmen backed away. Almost as if it understood that some ultimate moment had arrived, the beast pawed the earth and faced Shaka. Had the Zulus trained it for

such an encounter? Did they somehow prepare the calves to provide such moments of drama? Certainly no wild beast would behave in such a manner. Kai glimpsed, and in a shadowy manner understood, something new about the culture whose daughter he was to marry.

Kai and Nandi were eighty cubits to the side, and Kai was ready to wheel and run for it if the monster broke in his direction. But he was also transfixed by its power, by the lethal sweep of its horns and breadth of shoulder. In the darkness, partially lit by torches, it seemed more a creature of myth than reality, and Shaka some conquering hero of legend, not a man of flesh and bone.

Shaka and Keefah drew their bows, pulling steadily...

Suddenly, as if finally comprehending its danger, the animal flickered its tail and turned, vanishing into the high grass. As it turned, Shaka loosed his first arrow and it struck behind the buffalo's shoulder. Keefah's shaft, only a moment later, missed the flank and drove into the ground. Roaring with pain and anger, the buffalo made a *chuffing* sound as it disappeared.

##

Bearing lanterns and spears, the footmen beat the long grass, pushing ahead in a horseshoe configuration. They were supported by horsemen, all holding to the rigid pattern.

Shaka rode along the outside, striving for position. When their prey tried to break away, it was herded back with shouts and spears. The buffalo seemed confused, but far from fatigued.

Shaka raced for a shooting position ahead of his prey, but without warning the animal changed course, racing back straight for the footmen. With insane courage they thrust their spears, shone their lights in its eyes and shouted. Again it wheeled, running for the open again, where Shaka waited, bow drawn.

Then the beast doubled back again, suddenly ignoring the shouts and spear-thrusts. Several of the men cast their *umkhontos*. Two struck the beast, the hafts flagging out from its back and side like dreadful bamboo stalks, blood running black in the darkness.

The center man was little more than a boy, perhaps seventeen summers. He lost his nerve, cast poorly as the buffalo came straight at him, and missed his mark completely. The men scattered as it charged their line. The beast caught the boy who had missed his cast, gouging his back and sending him flying.

The boy landed hard in the grass, screaming and thrashing, reaching back spastically for the bleeding wound.

"Fool!" Shaka yelled as he rode by. There was a sheen of madness on his face now. His eyes were too wide, lips pulled tight against his white teeth. The footmen had been left

behind now—it was up to the horsemen.

Shaka was racing beside the wounded prey now. He gripped his bow and aimed, horse and buffalo seeming to match each other stride for stride.

He released his bolt, and it entered just behind the left shoulder. The buffalo stumbled, rose again, and thundered on, obviously wounded. Shaka released a second arrow. As it struck the buffalo's knees crumpled, and it dove nose-first into the ground with an earth-shaking impact that would have shattered a lesser creature's spine.

Kai held his breath, unable to fully grasp what he had just witnessed, beyond any doubt the most intense experience of his young life. Allah preserve him! He did not even know that men such as these existed!

Shaka raised his hands to the stars. "Haiii!"

"Who is the greatest hunter in all creation?" Darbul roared.

And his footmen, gasping now as they caught up with him, cheered in expected response. Shaka trotted his horse over to his trophy—

And it lurched up, catching Shaka's horse in the belly with its horn. Mortally wounded and neighing in agony, his mount tumbled over backwards, and Shaka spilled. Despite his awesome athleticism he crashed awkwardly to earth.

Shaka seemed momentarily dazed, disoriented, and for a moment the entire party was frozen, as if they shared his confusion. As Shaka's mount whined pitifully, the buffalo lurched to its feet. In that instant it could have slain Shaka, but instead it seemed to stare at him, blood drooling from its nose.

The Zulu's face was gaunt and strained. Kai knew that in that moment Shaka Zulu, great hunter, great warrior, was gazing into the face of his own death, and that his soul had recoiled from the awful sight.

Then, twin shots rang out. The buffalo staggered to its knees, then collapsed onto its side.

Kai turned, startled. His father and brother both had their rifles to their shoulders. Smoke drifted from both barrels.

Composing himself as best he could, Shaka rose. His limbs trembled a bit. Perhaps it was the chill of night, but Kai thought otherwise. Shaka gave a perfunctory nod of thanks to Abu Ali and his son, and walked on unsteady legs to the buffalo.

Kai found himself looking deep into the beast's eyes. The mighty buffalo's breath huffed in painful bursts. Its black eyes were filmed with dust. Kai's next reaction startled him. This poor thing had been stolen in childhood from its native land, raised only to die for the

entertainment of its captors. It had struggled for freedom and life; that Kai could understand. Pointless and absurd as it seemed, he wanted to tell the felled creature *well done*.

Shaka snatched a spear from one of his men, and drove it into the wounded beast's side. It heaved in pain. Shaka bore down with all his weight, working the spear back and forth until the heart was pierced and the buffalo lay still.

Shaka raised his arms in victory, yelling in musical, staccato Zulu. The men replied in kind.

"*Ngikhuluma isiZulu kancane*," Kai said haltingly to Nandi. *I speak only a bit of Zulu.* "What did he say?"

"He said that this was no ordinary creature, it was a demon, and in slaying it he has become more than a man." Her eyes shone with admiration. She had apparently seen nothing that was not glorious, nothing in the least disturbing in her uncle's behavior. Was that pragmatism? An understanding that even the bravest men know fear? Or delusion, an inability to acknowledge what she had seen? He wasn't sure which, and that uncertainty troubled him.

To Kai's gaze, Shaka had not yet fully recovered, and his trembling was not from the cold. His men apparently noticed nothing of their leader's momentary weakness. They cheered, beating their spears against the ground. Kai and his family smiled politely, but shared searing sidelong glances.

Shaka wrenched his spear from the dead animal's side. Its tip glistened black with blood. He rubbed his finger slowly along the edge. Ignoring his dying horse, Shaka then ran to the spot where his second man had been injured. Kai broke his mount into a trot to keep up.

The wounded youth was curled onto his side like an injured lizard, his right arm still groping back for the bleeding wound.

"You are hurt," Shaka said coldly.

The wounded man looked up at Shaka, his teeth chattering.

"Your stupidity could have killed me," Shaka continued, in a conversational tone.

The wounded man said something in Zulu. Kai had the very clear impression that he was begging for his life.

Shaka spoke to him in the same language, his face calm and comforting. Then with shocking suddenness he raised the spear and thrust it deeply into the hunter's stomach. Kai's stomach fisted as the boy's body arched, as if trying to take the spear more deeply into his belly. Then with dreadful finality, he went limp.

Kai felt dizzy and sick with rage.

"Allah preserve us!" Abu Ali said in disbelief. "What have you done?"

Shaka withdrew the spear, and wiped it on the dead boy's chest. "What is my right." He shrugged as if it was of little consequence. "He would have died in some days. To die on your king's spear is an honor."

The Wakil's face was as stone. "There are no kings in Bilalistan."

Shaka grinned and pointed to his men, who had moved to encircle the party. "Tell *them*," he said.

Kai scanned them. Fourteen now, standing proud and silent, chests high, gripping their spears, ready to kill or die for the man they followed. Kai felt a deep and pervasive cold seeping into his bones.

"There were kings in the days of my fathers," Shaka said. "Mark well--there may be again."

His mood had shifted completely, as if killing the hunter had purged him of all stress. He turned to his men. "Bring me the head! Put my steed from its misery. Bear your brother on a stretcher. He burns tomorrow."

Shaka ordered one of his men off his horse, and mounted without a trace of hesitation. If he had been injured in the fall, the injury was already forgotten. His men scrambled to fulfill his orders.

Abu Ali and his sons rode together quietly, watching. Nandi pulled her horse up next to Shaka, clearly worshipful. "Uncle," she said. "You were wonderful. But weren't you afraid?"

Shaka Zulu rode proudly. "Nandi, fear is neither ally nor enemy. I never see fear, my child."

Ali whispered in Kai's ear: "You cannot see what lives behind your own eyes."

"Father," Kai said. "What do we do?"

Abu Ali shook his head. "The Zulus are allies of the Empress--and Shaka is as much royalty as Lamiya. On their land, it is their world. We can do nothing."

They watched the dead man rolled onto a stretcher. His eyes were open and turned up. Blood leaked from his side.

"It is not right," Kai said quietly.

"No, it is not," agreed Abu Ali. "But it is done."

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LION'S BLOOD . . . In Stores February 2002!

About Steven Barnes:



Steve Barnes is one of today's most exciting writers in the fields of speculative and science fiction. His books have been called "Exciting", "Inspirational", and "Ground Breaking". With *Lion's Blood*, Steve has taken his work to a new level. Writer of the Emmy-winning OUTER LIMITS episode *A Stitch In Time*, as well as episodes of TWILIGHT ZONE and ANDROMEDA., Barnes has been nominated for the Hugo, Endeavor and Cable Ace awards.

What people are saying about *Lion's Blood*:

"*Lion's Blood* is the best book Steve Barnes has ever written. It offers just enough of a mirror image of history to seduce readers into a story that is imaginative, well researched, well written, and devastating."

--Octavia E. Butler

"With *Lion's Blood*, science-fiction superstar Steven Barnes delivers an epic, daring alternate universe novel that is both a page-turning adventure story and a work that raises the stakes for speculative fiction. His fully imagined universe is complete, intelligent, and compassionate toward all his characters. Readers, after turning the last page of *Lion's Blood*, will have but a single request: More!"

--Charles Johnson, National Book Award Winner, author of "Middle Passage."

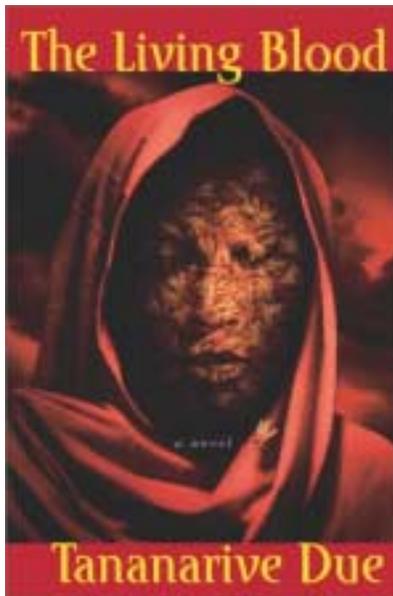
"Not since Robert A. Heinlein's *Farnham's Freehold* has anyone seriously tackled one of the big what-ifs of American history. Unlike Heinlein, Steven Barnes does it right. His novel of black masters and European slaves goes to the heart of the human condition, showing that people are people, and chance, not skin color, makes them what and who they are. It's one of the important novels of the year, and not to be missed."

--Harry Turtledove

Tananarive Due:
"Lady of the House"
www.tananarivedue.com

Recent Novel: *The Living Blood*. A *Los Angeles Times* Bestseller!

Acclaimed for her riveting fiction, which tests the boundaries of supernatural suspense, Tananarive Due returns with a gloriously imagined tale of an ancient cult's undying powers -- now embodied by a child who can grow to become either monster or savior.



The Living Blood

Jessica Jacobs-Wolde worked hard to rebuild her life in Miami after the disappearance of her husband, David, and the death of her daughter Kira at his hand. Four years later, she is still coming to terms with a shocking truth: David, who is part of an ancient group of immortals -- a hidden African clan that has survived for more than a thousand years -- gave Jessica and their second daughter, Fana, the gift of his healing blood.

Now Jessica is running an isolated clinic in Botswana -- one that has swiftly earned a reputation for its astounding success rate in curing desperately ill children -- and she hopes to find the tribe of souls with whom Fana truly belongs. Just three and a half years old, the girl is displaying signs of tremendous power -- conjuring storms, editing her mother's memories, and striking people down with a thought. Her growing abilities need to be tamed -- and soon. Already Fana's dreams are haunted by a shadowy entity, someone -- or something -- she can only

call the Bee Lady.

Unaware that they are being tracked by Lucas Shepard, a doctor from Florida who hopes to save his dying son, and by a group of fortune hunters who will stop at nothing to exploit the power coursing through her veins, Jessica journeys to Ethiopia in search of the Life Brothers. There, she will be reunited with her immortal beloved. There, the full force of Fana's powers will be revealed. And there, Jessica, David, Fana, and the good doctor Shepard, though himself a mere mortal, will engage in an epic and transcontinental battle over the ultimate fate of humanity.

Blending the supernatural with a thrilling vision of our times, this is a powerful and sweeping tale of love, horror, immortality, and redemption from an astounding storyteller.

Here's an exclusive short story from Tananarive: "Lady of the House"

LADY OF THE HOUSE

by Tananarive Due

My daddy's favorite phrase as he thrashed my forearm with a switch from the dogwood shrub in front of our house was, "I'm raising you to be a lady. I ain't gon' have you comin' up wild." I used to get whuppings not just when I did wrong, but for *thinking* about doing wrong. Just like any girl who doesn't quite believe in her face, I was always thinking ahead to which boy I could go after to make me feel pretty. How Daddy always knew what was in my head was the second-biggest mystery of my young life. The first-biggest mystery was Boogie-Woman.

We knew the woman who lived in the squat wood-frame house at the end of the road, beyond the dense stand of live oaks and a tangle of brush left growing with its own mind for at least thirty years, was named Arlice Ransaw. Everyone in the neighborhood knew that. The Ransaws were a big family, tobacco-pickers, and all of the six Ransaw children, except for Arlice, had gone on to college and left Quincy behind in the 'Fifties. The mama and daddy were long-dead. "If you don't act right," Daddy said during one of my thrashings, "you'll end up like Arlice. You may not look like her, but no decent man will want you."

Arlice was a shut-in, and I'd been told her siblings sent her money so she could order deliveries for just about anything in the world she wanted, even groceries, which came from Winn-Dixie once every two weeks. All of us kids would circle like flies around the trucks parked outside of her house; furniture companies, flower companies, UPS delivery. We tried to imagine how the house looked on the *inside*, but we never could, really. How could we? Even as big as our imaginations were, they weren't big enough to see inside Boogie-Woman's living room, or the horrors in her kitchen.

It made us giggle when we heard the deliverymen knock on the door and call out, “Is the lady of the house in?”

Lady. They wouldn’t think so for long, we knew. We always had the same question for her visitors as they left: “Did you see her?”

Mostly, they just shook their heads; she’d hidden herself around the corner, they said, directing as an unseen voice. A few others would laugh, slapping their afternoon’s labors from their palms onto dusty trousers, slyly keeping what they’d seen secret from us. But one or two, if they had the time or inclination, enjoyed their audience of a half-dozen inquisitive children and supplied the intrigue we yearned for. Not that they had to embellish much at all.

“That lady in there,” one man said, shaking his head, “is a werewolf sho’ as I’m breathing.”

That made us scream with glee, because someone from the outside, a stranger and an adult, had seen our street’s prize, and we chased after his truck, waving, hoping he’d share the secret with the world and give us a sliver of fame.

Despite her best efforts to keep out of all people’s sight, most of us children, at one time or another, had seen her for ourselves because we had the time and patience, hours on end, to plant ourselves where we needed to be. We hadn’t seen her close up, but from a distance of two-dozen yards. My friend Sadie lived two houses from Boogie-Woman, and if we stood against her back fence and waited long enough, we’d see the woman throw open her back door, walk down her steps, and hunch over to pick yellow sunflowers that grew beside her back porch. They were not pretty flowers, not to me, so yellow, huge and monstrous, like something from a made-up story. They befitted the gardener, those flowers. They very nearly glowed in the dark.

And Arlice herself was much more of a spectacle. She always arranged her white teeth in a strange grimace on her face, as though she were trying to smile for company, or the way my grandmother looked when she got a pain in her bad hip.

But the smile was only the beginning. That wasn't why she'd earned her nickname.

Every bit of her skin we could see beneath whatever she happened to be wearing--whether it was long-sleeved plaid shirt with dungarees, or a cotton dress that hung to her ankles--was covered with wiry, matted black hair. The first time my brother and Sadie and me saw her in daylight, underneath the fiery orange sunset pouring through her tree branches, our breath turned heavy in our open mouths. Garrett, my brother, turned and ran off with a whine, because he was too young then to show his fear the way he would a few years later, when he would launch stones against her windows until he heard the ringing crunch of breaking glass.

Beneath the brown, shining skin of her forehead and her downcast eyes, hair grew all across her cheeks, her jaw, her neck. It grew against her chest, her forearms, and maybe even on her back, though none of us would ever see this for ourselves. She was big-breasted and thin-waisted the way my daddy's friends said they liked their women, with all the right curves in back. The hair ruined it all. She was the most hideous sight any of us had ever seen, or figured we ever would. At night, in the dark, every single one of us could see her hairy face in our minds before we went to sleep. She didn't fool us. We knew she was only pretending to lock herself away in that house. We knew that any night, we might hear a tapping at our windows and Boogie-Woman would be there.

In the daylight, though, staring at her from behind Sadie's fence, that wanna-be smile she wore, the one showing all her teeth, made her look like she was bracing for pains.

Every neighborhood has a historian, and my gradmama was ours, even though she'd moved away to live with her other son, my Uncle Pete down in Gainesville, and we didn't see her much at all except at holiday time. I had to know all about Arlice, I just *had* to, and Grandmama was the best person to ask. That Christmas when Uncle Pete drove her up, and she was still unpacking her ruffled collars and unwrinkled shawls from her suitcase, I bounced on her bed and told her we'd seen Arlice in daylight. We'd seen her for real.

“What you spying on that poor woman for?” Grandmama asked.

Spying! It was a mean word, hardly representative of what me and Sadie and Garrett were doing out by the fence, sucking on Popsicles and waiting on Boogie-Woman to open her back door.

“Gram, how come she got all that hair?” I asked her.

Grandmama spent most of that day pretending she hadn't heard me, asking me to stand up straight so she could hold one of her print dresses up against me to match the peach color to my skin, to decide if she should alter it to fit me. Then, she showed me the proper way to peel boiled sweet potatoes, still hot from the pot, which I never could learn right because they made my fingertips burn. Then, she started telling me a drawn-out story about my mama and how she'd collected licorice sticks in a mason jar in her room until the whole house smelled spicy, sickly sweet. And I tolerated all of these detours--even the licorice story, which she told at least once every time she saw me--because I figured, sooner or later, she would get around to Arlice. I didn't ask her about it again, because I knew she'd never tell me if I did. I knew I would just have to wait, until my wondering eyes wore her down.

“When Arlice was your age,” Grandmama began at last, and my heart leaped, “I used to see her at church. Family was poor, sharecroppers really, but all them chil'ren came dressed up every Sunday like it was Holy Communion. She was a tall girl, thin, good smile. I figure she must have been nine or ten when the hair started to grow in.”

I began to wish there was more light in the living room besides the lamp on daddy's piano, which was so dim I could barely see Grandmama's face good. Garrett and Daddy and Uncle Pete were out back looking at Uncle Pete's transmission, or something men would look at to try to conquer, so only me and Grandmama were in the house. It scared me, for some reason, imagining Arlice as a little girl in a starched church dress, *not* having the hair.

“Guess you could say she'd always had hairy arms. Nothing like they is now, but thick for a child like that. But wasn't 'till later it started growing underneath her chin, like this...” With

that, Grandmama lifted her chin and showed me what I had never noticed before; a brush of fine black and gray hairs nestling against her loose skin. "...so's you could barely notice, but there all the same. One day, I saw hairs on her cheeks, whiskers like a man would grow. By the time she was thirteen years old, Jesus help, that child was so overgrown with hair she looked like a circus show. Family didn't bring her to church no more. Only time you saw her, she had a kerchief tied around her face."

"Where did the hair come from, Gram?" I asked, my same question from hours before, but finally it was asked at the appropriate time. And Garrett, I thought, was so busy trying to act grown by staying outside with Daddy that he would miss his chance to hear the story.

"Them was some superstitious folks," she told me, "so Arlice's daddy, Waylan Ransaw, tore 'round town saying this person and that person put a hex on his girl, nonsense like that. Waylan Ransaw had plenty to be hexed for, just like his daddy before him, so probably his conscience made him think so. You're too young to understand it now, but them chil'rens he had with Mrs. Beatrice Ransaw wasn't his only chil'ren, and people said Arlice wasn't none of hers nohow. Said Arlice had been born to a lady in Havana who was so 'shamed she jumped off a bridge. That's the truth, not no gossip."

Despite myself, I sighed a little impatiently, because I had lost the train of Grandmama's conversation, and something told me she'd veered far away from Arlice and all her hair. She went on, frowning sour: "The shame was how Waylan and Beatrice Ransaw treated that child once it started growing. They was some ignorant folks. Kept her in the house. Told her she was a demon-child. And I guess she b'lieved it, because she ain't come out of that house yet."

A demon-child! This was better than I'd expected. I couldn't wait to tell Sadie.

"Grandmama" I said, suddenly curious, "what would you have done if that had been me?" Because, after all, Grandmama had taken me in when I was a baby, when my mama died from asthma when I was less than a year old and my daddy was still overseas in the Army. And she could have done with me anything at all she chose. Grandmama snorted. "One thing

for sure,” she said, lifting her chin again, and I could barely see those fine hairs of hers in the low light from across the room, “I’d have carried you to the best damn doctor I could find. Hairs come from hormones gone crazy. Any fool knows that.”

I didn’t know what hormones were, but I lifted my palm to my chin and rubbed my skin to reassure myself with the feel of my own smoothness. Sitting in this near-dark, I’d spooked myself into thinking some hairs had sprung up while I wasn’t paying attention. I wondered if Grandmama had those hairs on her chin when she was little, like me, or if hormones only came when you got old. But how could they, when Arlice got them when she was only a little girl? I wanted to ask her this, but I didn’t, because I wasn’t sure I wanted to hear the answer. One day you’re little, and then you’re not. And in my mind I was seeing the little girl Arlice singing and clapping in church with hair on her arms, just a little, not knowing how the story would turn out in the end.

I was twelve, with a chin-hair or two of my own, the day the police arrested Arlice. She’d screamed and thrown one of those big carving knives end over end all the way across her yard at Garrett and missed his hard head by only two or three inches, imbedding it into the trunk of one of her trees. We all heard her yell. Garrett made up all kinds of pouting stories about why he was there--“Shoot, I wasn’t bothering that lady, I was just walking by”--but Sadie and me and all the other kids knew how he’d been throwing rocks at her windows, and how Arlice was always having to pay a glass repairman to come fix them. She just never complained, she never said anything about it, so neither did we.

Daddy was mad as hell when Garrett told him what Arlice did, when Garrett walked Daddy down the street to show him the knife still clinging to the sap-bleeding tree trunk. Daddy was the reason the police came. And *everybody* came outside then, because it wasn’t like it is on that street nowadays, when police cars come every day and everybody can name a friend who’s been to jail, or who’s going. Police were a big event back then. On top of that, people

came out from blocks away because they heard the Boogie-Woman tried to kill somebody. And they wanted to see for themselves if she looked the way they'd told themselves in their imaginations, or if she looked like something worse.

Seemed like the police wanted to see her up close, too, because they didn't bring one police car, they brought three. It was late-afternoon on a Saturday, nearly dark, and the street in front of Arlice's house looked like a family reunion. People were laughing, standing over their bicycles or huddling in Arlice's shade with their arms crossed, telling stories, catching up, just reveling in how glad they were to be them and not her.

And Arlice didn't disappoint them. The police brought her out in full view, walking two steps behind her, and we could all see her face even though she was trying to cover it with her arms. Nobody had thought to give her a newspaper or a jacket like they always do on TV. And when she walked down that path, everybody hushed up, just watching. I heard Sadie's father say, "God *damn*," because even though Sadie had been telling him about her all these years, maybe he thought we'd made her up in our heads. And then a couple of people made a sound like they wanted to laugh, but they were scared to. Even Garrett stood there saying nothing, slack-jawed.

There was one thing, though: I don't know if some of the hair had fallen out, or if maybe the years since I'd first gotten a good look at her had painted a different picture in my head, but she didn't look the way I thought she would. She still had hair all over her face, and growing in a bush above the top button of her blouse, and up and down her long arms, but it wasn't thick and tangled like I remembered. The hair looked thin and scattered, and I could see much more of her brown skin showing through underneath than I remembered.

Everyone jumped back when we heard her make a shrieking sound, and one of the officers grabbed her arm like we all expected her to leap into the air and start clawing away at our hairless faces, arms and chests. But then we remembered crying sounds like shrieking, too, and we stopped feeling scared. Her crying was like anybody else's, hard to listen to. I suddenly

didn't care if she'd tried to hurt Garrett or not. Plenty of times I'd wanted to hurt Garrett my own self.

I watched her as she took jerky jogging steps toward the back seat of that police car like it was someplace she'd always wanted to go. I thought I heard her sigh before they closed the door behind her. Probably, I thought, she couldn't wait to slouch down, invisible, across the seat. Probably, she couldn't wait to be driven away.

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About Tananarive Due:



TANANARIVE DUE (pronounced tah-nah-nah-REEVE doo) is part of a generation of writers taking African-American fiction into new, unusual directions. Her novels *THE LIVING BLOOD* (2001; Pocket Books) *MY SOUL TO KEEP* (1997; Harper Collins) and *THE BETWEEN* (1994; Harper Collins) are journeys into supernatural suspense—bringing a unique African-American flavor and sensibility to tales that will keep readers awake at night.

Due's first novel, *THE BETWEEN* was been nominated for the Bram Stoker Award by the Horror Writers of America. Her other two novels, *MY SOUL TO KEEP* and *THE LIVING BLOOD*, were recognized in the Best Novels of the Year listings by Publishers Weekly.

Here's what people are saying about her recent novel, *THE LIVING BLOOD*:

"An event of sustained power and energy...A rare example of a sequel that improves upon the original, this novel should set a standard for supernatural thrillers of the new millennium."

– **Publishers Weekly** (starred review)

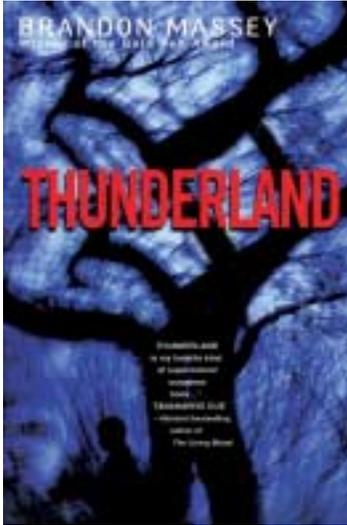
"Smart, soulful, crafty Tananarive Due deserves the attention of everyone interested in contemporary American fiction. In *THE LIVING BLOOD*, this young writer opens up realms of experience that add to our storehouse of shared reality, and by doing so widens our common vision. She is one of the best and most significant writers of her generation."

– **Peter Straub**

(New York Times bestselling author of *MR. X* and *BLACK HOUSE*)

Tananarive lives in Washington with her husband, novelist Steven Barnes. Her next novel, *THE GOOD HOUSE*, a riveting, contemporary tale of possession set in the Pacific Northwest, will be published by Pocket Books in September 2003.

Brandon Massey
"The Monster"
www.brandonmassey.com



THUNDERLAND: Coming December 2002

He flipped backward. His back cracked onto the limb beneath him, waves of agony ripping through his body. He groped madly for a branch, a twig, a leaf, anything, but his hands found no holds. He tumbled off the limb and dropped a full twenty feet to the hard earth below.

As he fell, he heard his mother scream.

He heard himself screaming, too.

Then he hit the earth, and all he knew was darkness.

Days later, young Jason Brooks wakes up to a whole new world. His mother-once a neglectful, angry drunk-has given up the bottle to spend more time with him. The father he barely knew is now making an honest effort to mend his troubled marriage. And shy, self-conscious Jason has made friends-at last. The whole family is well on the way to recovery-and to finding the happiness that in the past has proved so elusive.

But then the nightmares start...

The stalker creeps into the bedroom. He bends down, slowly lifting the bedspread. He lifts it higher...and Jason wakes up screaming, his heart thudding in his chest.

And strange things begin to happen...

Cryptic messages appear on the bathroom mirror. Clothing flies about the room. The bed rises in the air...and thumps back to the ground. And always, in the distance, thunder roars...

Because someone-or something-is coming.

For Jason...

Here's a special short story from Brandon: "The Monster"

The Monster

by Brandon Massey

It was half-past two o'clock in the morning, and what frightened Jared more than anything in the world was having to get out of his bed in the middle of the night and go to the bathroom. Most times, he'd rather pee on himself. But he was ten and couldn't pee on himself any more. Mom would get upset, and Dad would . . . well, he didn't want to think about what Dad would do to him.

But the thought of getting out of bed was actually worse than thinking of what Dad would do to him if he peed on himself. See, there was a monster under his bed.

Jared lay under the covers, his bladder throbbing. It was way too dark in the room; the curtains were closed and Dad wouldn't let him sleep with a night light. The only light came from the clock on the nightstand. The clock digits gave off a ghostly, greenish glow.

He raised up, his eyes slowly adjusting to the darkness. He held his breath. Listened.

He heard the monster, breathing softly. It might be asleep. Did monsters sleep? He didn't know. He had never even seen the monster, really. But it was real. It only crawled under the bed at night, and he always heard it breathing, shifting around, or whispering in a strange language that he didn't understand.

The monster had only begun living under his bed a few months ago. He remembered when the monster first arrived. It had been the night that Mom and Dad had gotten into the worst fight they'd ever had (until then). Crouched under his bed covers, Jared had heard every turn of his parents' battle: the shouts, the breaking dishes, the cries, the scary sound of flesh smacking flesh. Jared had wanted to do something to help Mom, but he was afraid. Later that night, Dad

had left the house, and that was when Jared realized that he hated his father--well, stepfather, really. He hated him. Mom taught him that it was wrong to hate people, but Jared couldn't help the way he felt. Sometimes he was sure that Mom hated Dad, too.

And in the middle of that unforgettable night, unable to sleep, Jared suddenly became aware of deep breathing beneath his bed, as if a big dog had crawled under there and fallen asleep. Summoning his courage, he peeked underneath the bed. He saw the faint glimmer of a pair of bluish eyes.

The sight had sent him to his parents' room, screaming. Mom thought he was upset about the big fight and let him sleep in the bed with her. Ordinarily, he never would've wanted to sleep in Mom's bed because that was for babies, but he was too scared to go back to his room. He didn't tell Mom about the monster. She would never believe him. Adults never believed anything that kids his age talked about--especially when the subject was monsters.

When morning finally came, he crept into his room and checked under the bed. Nothing was there. He wondered if he had dreamed up everything.

That was, until the monster returned a few nights later, when Mom and Dad had another fight.

There was one thing Jared understood for sure about the monster. It only came around in the late night hours, after his parents had fought.

He began to believe that the monster was there to keep him company. The monster scared him, but in a strange way, he sort of felt safe when it arrived. Kind of like Rob Jenkins, the biggest, baddest bully at his school, who seemed to like him for a reason he didn't understand. Rob frightened him and he was careful not to upset him, but he felt that whenever Rob was around, he was protected. It was weird.

Mom and Dad had been fighting again that night, so the monster was there. But Dad hadn't left the house. Jared thought Dad was sleeping on the couch downstairs. During the fight, Jared heard Mom run upstairs and lock herself in the bedroom, and Dad had been crashing

around downstairs, making so much noise Jared was sure the police would come. But they never did. After a while, Dad finally got quiet and probably fell asleep in front of the TV like he usually did.

Jared looked at the bedroom door, which was open just a crack. The white door seemed to be far away, like the other end of a whole basketball court. But things were always like that at night, in the dark. His senses got screwy.

His stomach was starting to hurt, he needed to pee so badly.

Slowly, he pulled away the covers. Cool air wrapped around his legs. Dad always kept it so cold in the house that Jared sometimes slept with socks on. He didn't have socks on then. He wished that he did, to protect his feet in case the monster grabbed a foot.

He would have to be fast.

He got an idea. Instead of swinging his legs over the side of the bed, and risk getting snared by the monster's tentacles (he figured the monster had to have a long, ropy tentacle, like an octopus), he stood on the mattress; it creaked a little beneath him. Quietly, he walked to the end of the bed. He checked the surrounding carpet to make sure that nothing waited to trip him. Then he leaped off the mattress.

He landed on the floor with a soft thump.

He looked behind him. Nothing rushed out at him from under the bed. He didn't see a tentacle, or glowing blue eyes. Everything looked normal.

But he heard the monster breathing. Its breaths were not as slow and deep as before; it drew shorter breaths, as if it were awake. Alert.

Maybe it planned to catch him when he returned to the bed. If that was what it really wanted to do. He didn't know. He hadn't even begun to plan how he would manage to climb under the covers. He couldn't think about it yet. His bladder was on fire.

He flung open the door and rushed down the hallway to the bathroom. He could barely get his pajamas down fast enough to keep from leaking all over himself. Nasty.

It seemed like he peed forever. He'd drunk a lot of Pepsi before he went to bed. Mom had ordered a pepperoni-and-cheese pizza for dinner and a twelve-pack of Pepsi, and soon after the pizza got there, she and Dad got into the argument. Jared had taken the cola to his room and sipped it nervously while he listened to them battle. He must've drunk four cans worth. Mom would've been upset if she had known.

Jared had just finished relieving himself and was washing his hands when he heard Dad's heavy footsteps on the stairs.

Jared frantically dried his hands on a towel. He reached to switch off the bathroom light . . .

"Jay, what the hell are you doing up?" Dad said.

Jared froze, hand poised over the light switch. Dad emerged like a giant from the darkness of the hallway, entering the arc of light that spilled from the bathroom. He wore his normal sleeping gear: white underwear. That was all. Dad had been living with him and Mom for three years, and Jared had never gotten used to the sight of the man strolling around in his underwear. There was something disgusting about it.

Dad carried his black leather belt loosely in his hand, too; it resembled a dormant snake. Both Mom and Jared knew the belt very well.

"Speak up, boy," Dad said. Leaning against the wall, he dug his hand into his crotch, scratched. "Damn, why you always act like you can't talk?"

"Umm, I was just using the bathroom," Jared said. "I'm going back to bed."

"Slow down, little man." Dad raised his hand. Jared smelled whiskey and funk rolling like hot steam from Dad's body; he coughed into his hand. "You know what me and your Mama were tangling about tonight?"

Jared shrugged. He chastised himself for not escaping back to his room before Dad appeared.

"Don't act dumb, Jay. It was about your sorry-assed daddy. I don't want him calling my house. I don't care if he's only calling for you. This is my crib and he's disrespecting me." Dad

suddenly farted loudly, and the nauseating sound was like an exclamation point. Jared grimaced.

"The next time he calls here, you hang up on him," Dad said. "You don't say a word to him, and you don't tell your mother. Clear?"

"But . . ."

Dad sprang from the wall. "But what?"

Jared chewed his lip. "But . . . he's my father. You aren't." The words slipped out of him, and the instant they did, he knew he'd made a mistake.

Although Dad had been drinking, he moved toward Jared with startling speed. The next thing Jared knew, Dad had seized him by his shoulders, hefted him in the air, and pinned him against the wall. Terror surged like hot oil through his veins, and he felt himself needing to pee again.

Dad's face, twisted by fury, floated like a dark moon in front of him. Spittle sprayed from Dad's lips as he spoke.

"You listen to me, you little bastard. I'm your daddy. That nigga that you think is your daddy-forget him. He ain't here. I pay the bills and take care of you and your Mama. If I ever hear you disrespect me like that again, I'm gonna break my belt over your ass. Clear?"

Jared could barely breathe. Fear had tightened his throat. When he tried to speak only a thin whistle of air came out.

Dad shook him, making Jared's head knock against the wall. He felt dizzy.

"Hear me? Is that clear?"

Tears leaked from Jared's eyes. His throat was too tight for him to say anything, heart pounding so hard he felt like he was going to choke. He felt warm pee streaming down his leg, and the shame that burned through him made him cry harder.

"Put my baby down right now!"

Mom's enraged voice cut through the haze in Jared's mind. His mouth flew open, and all he

cried out was, "Mama, help!"

Dad dropped him, and Jared hit the floor on numbed legs. He stumbled, tears blurring his vision, but not even his tears kept him from seeing Mom in her nightgown, coming at Dad with a hammer.

Bust his wide head open, Mama, bust it open like a watermelon, he wanted to shout at her. But she was so tiny compared to Dad. Even with a weapon, she couldn't beat Dad, he was just too big.

As Mom swung the hammer at Dad, he snagged her arm in mid-air. He backhanded her across the mouth. She cried out, spun around and struck the wall.

"I'm the king of this house, goddammit!" Dad said. He took the hammer and smashed it against the wall, paint chips crashing to the floor. He whipped the hammer around in another wild arc, clobbered another wall. Jared was sure he was going to hit Mom. Mom cowered under Dad, holding her lip.

Jared couldn't stand back and act helpless any more. He just couldn't. He had to help Mom.

He fled to his bedroom.

Dad whirled. "That's it, run, you little bastard. This is all your fault anyway, you know that? Everything would be fine if you hadn't been born!"

Jared made it inside his room. Had to get his hands on something that could keep Dad away from Mom. He could get his baseball bat. Mom had bought him a nice Louisville slugger for Christmas last year.

He looked back and forth across his room. He didn't see the bat. Where was it . . .

He remembered that he'd left it under the bed.

He'd put the bat under the bed months ago, in anticipation of something just like this happening. But that was before the monster had arrived.

There was no way he was going to reach under the bed with the monster there. No way.

Outside in the hallway, he heard leather snapping against flesh, Dad cursing, and Mom

crying softly. She endured Dad's belt beatings quietly

He felt like he was going to throw up. He wanted to cover his ears and crawl back under the covers, like he always did. But he couldn't. He just couldn't take this any more. Bat or not bat.

He rushed to the doorway. Dad's back faced him; Mom was sprawled underneath Dad, her delicate body trembling as Dad popped the belt against her in smooth, rhythmic strokes.

"Get away from her, you crazy motherfucker," Jared said. It was the first time he'd ever used the "f" word, and it felt strange coming from his lips. "Get away from her right now."

"What?" Dad looked at him. "What did you say, boy?"

"I . . ." Jared couldn't finish his sentence. He couldn't believe what he'd just said. Oh, was he in for it now.

Dad charged after him. Jared backpedaled into his room, fists balled at his side.

He wanted to hide, but there was nowhere to go. The only escape was through the doorway.

And now Dad was there.

Dad chuckled, winding the belt around his hand like a whip. "You think you're a big man now, huh? I'm gonna beat the black off your ass. This is my house, dammit."

Jared backed all the way up against the wall. Cold sweat had glued his fingers together. He couldn't have held a baseball bat if he'd had one.

"Leave him alone," Mom said from the hallway, but her voice sounded frail, beaten. There would be no rescue this time, Jared realized. He would endure this beating like a man. No more crying.

"Trying to be brave, little man?" Dad said. "We'll see how brave you act when I start popping this belt."

Jared breathed so hard and fast he was light-headed. He felt like he could be dreaming. He wished he were dreaming and he would awake and everything would be okay in the morning, and it would be only him and Mom in the house (they'd lived there before Dad, though he always called it "my house"), and Dad was gone forever. But that was only a dream. He wasn't

dreaming. This was real, and Dad was going to get him.

Dad stalked forward, belt swinging, fingers flexing.

Jared always closed his eyes when he was getting a whipping. But he wouldn't close them this time. He'd suffer the beating with his eyes wide open.

If he had closed his eyes, he would've missed what happened.

As Dad stomped past the foot of the bed, a thick, purple-black tentacle launched from under the bed and wrapped around Dad's ankle with a wet, slapping sound.

"What the . . ." Dad started to say, staring at the rope of flesh around his ankle, and his voice was suddenly drowned out by an inhuman roar that exploded from beneath the bed, as if a lion were under there. Jared's eyes grew large enough to pop out of his head.

It's the monster, the monster, the monster . . .

The creature yanked Dad's ankle, and Dad hit the floor on his back, yelling in a high-pitched voice: "Oh, shit, what the hell, help me, Jay, help me!" But Jared's feet seemed to be nailed to the carpet; he couldn't have moved if he'd wanted to. He was mesmerized, terrified.

Another dark tentacle shot out and twisted around Dad's other leg.

"Help me, Jay!" Dad was hollering now. He reminded Jared of an old woman.

The monster roared, a sound that made the walls tremble and the bed quake.

Jared didn't move. He imagined the creature beneath his bed as something that looked like an alligator but with lots of tentacles, and even more teeth . . . uh-huh, he wasn't moving.

The beast began to pull Dad toward the bed. Dad's arms flailed wildly. His hand snagged the leg of Jared's desk, slowing his progress toward the darkness underneath the bed.

Jared ran forward, raised his foot, and stomped on Dad's fingers. His hand fell away from the desk leg, and he slid closer to the bed.

"You bastard, I'm gonna get you . . ." Dad groped for Jared's leg, but Jared moved out of his reach.

The monster bellowed louder than before--and the bed itself was flung upward as if it were

the lid of a kettle. It hovered at almost a ninety degree angle, suspended by an invisible force.

Beneath, there was the monster.

It resembled an alligator, like Jared had imagined . . . but not really. It had maybe a dozen muscular tentacles, like an octopus . . . but it didn't look like an octopus either, really. Its eyes glowed a gas-jet blue. And it had teeth . . . rows and rows of long, sharp teeth.

How did this thing fit under my bed? The question flitted around the back of Jared's mind. How did I ever sleep with something like that right under me?

A shimmering pool of blackness surrounded the monster, like a dark ocean. Jared thought that the monster was much bigger than he'd figured; most of its body was concealed in the dark, watery aura.

Dad screamed.

The monster reeled Dad in, its enormous, toothy mouth wide open, Dad shrieking the entire way.

Jared wanted to turn away. He couldn't watch. He had seen enough. But he could not stop staring.

The monster swallowed Dad whole, like pythons gulp down their prey, except the monster did it so quickly that one instant Jared saw Dad . . . and the next instant the only thing left of Dad was his worn leather belt, dangling like a shred of lettuce from the creature's lips. Then the creature sucked in the belt, too.

Jared stared at the monster's glowing blue eyes. He waited for a tentacle to come out and grab him, too.

But the monster did not attack. Perhaps it was only his imagination, but it seemed to wink at him.

The bed, which had been suspended in the air the whole time, banged back to the floor.

Jared exhaled. His chest hurt.

He turned and saw Mom watching from the doorway.

"Did you see that?" he said.

Mom nodded. Her eyes were wide. "All of it."

Jared went to the bed. He didn't hear the monster breathing. He nudged the bed sideways a few feet.

Underneath, there was only the carpet, a few forgotten socks, and his Louisville slugger baseball bat. No sign of the monster. No otherworldly pool of darkness.

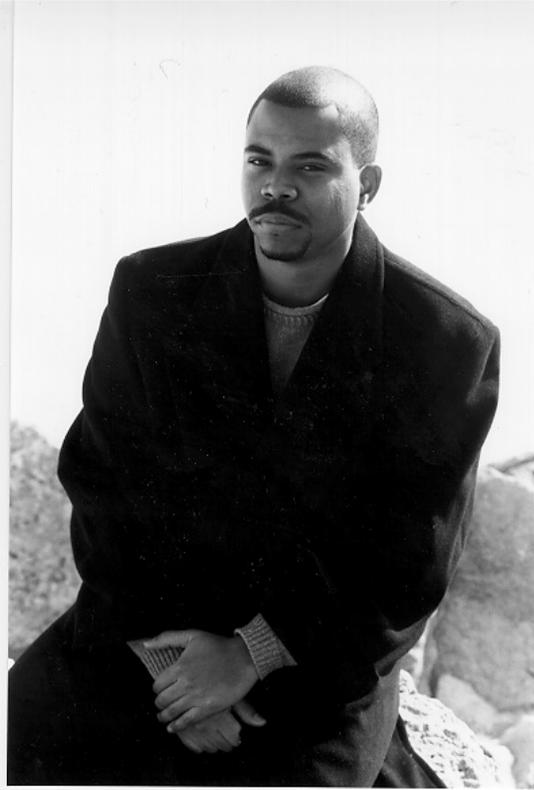
No sign of Dad.

Mom came forward and put her arm around his shoulders.

"I don't think it'll ever come back," Jared said. "I guess it did what it came here to do."

"That's right, took away the monster," Mom said, and they walked out of the bedroom together.

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About Brandon Massey:

Brandon Massey was born June 9, 1973 in Waukegan, Illinois. He is the author of **THUNDERLAND**, a harrowing, fast-paced tale of an African-American family battling a supernatural stranger.

Originally self-published, **THUNDERLAND** won the Gold Pen Award for the Best Thriller from the Black Writers Alliance. Brandon has been featured in publications such as Black Issues Book Review, Time, Black Enterprise, and The New York Times.

He publishes a monthly ezine, The Talespinner, in which he shares an original short story with his readers. Sign up for free by visiting his web site at www.brandonmassey.com

Bestselling author Tananarive Due had this to say about THUNDERLAND:

"I've been waiting a long time for a writer like Brandon Massey. **THUNDERLAND** is my favorite kind of supernatural suspense book -- one that takes place in a world that feels real, making readers believe in the unbelievable. With well-drawn characters and nonstop imagination, **THUNDERLAND** is a thrill-ride you won't soon forget."

THUNDERLAND hits stores nationwide in December 2002.

Brandon Massey lives in Atlanta, where he is at work on his next project, a supernatural thriller entitled **DARK CORNER**.