

# Black Market Reads Tananarive Due, author of *The Between*

[00:00:00] **Lissa Jones:** Welcome to Black Market Reads. On this episode Tananarive Due, the queen of Black Horror. In 1995, she released her first novel, *The Between*. Now that novel is being rereleased for a new generation of readers. A leading voice in Black speculative fiction for more than 20 years, Due has won an American book award and NAACP image award, and a British fantasy award.

And her writing has been included in best of the year anthologies. Her books include *ghosts*, *summer stories*, *my soul to keep* and *the good house*. She and her late mother civil rights activist, Patricia Stevens Due coauthored *freedom in the family*, a mother daughter, memoir of the fight for civil rights.

She's also a screenwriter and producer. Most recently, she executive produced *Shudders*, groundbreaking documentary *Horror Noire*, a history of Black Horror. In addition to this work, she teaches at UCLA on the topics of black horror and Afrofuturism.

[00:01:09] **Derek Emery:** [music] For the smart and free-thinking welcome to Black Market Reads with your host Lissa Jones

[00:01:22] **Lissa Jones:** Author Tananarive Due welcome to Black Market Reads.

[00:01:26] **Tananarive Due:** Thank you. Very excited to be here.

[00:01:29] **Lissa Jones:** Oh, I'm very, very excited to have you here. I want you to know that I read books all the time for this podcast. And something happened with your book that was unique for the first time. That is that I am supposed to take notes when I'm reading books, of course, because I'm going to interview you.

And I won't remember everything. And I got through the preface and I had six lines of notes. I couldn't put your book down, so I don't have any more notes. I have a whole bunch of memories and a whole bunch of other things, but your book was that good. And I want to just say thank you so much.

[00:02:01] **Tananarive Due:** Well, thank you. I really do think that books in general, but especially thriller horror books can help us escape during a trying times. So, yeah, I'm glad to hear it.

[00:02:14] **Lissa Jones:** Well, thank you. In fact, in your preface is sort of where I'd like to start. I read that you got introduced to horror by your mother through a Stephen King novel, *The Shining*.

[00:02:24] **Tananarive Due:** Yeah, Stephen King scared me so badly with it that I stopped. I went through the whole, I mean, it's impossible to read everything by Stephen King because he's written so much, but I've written a great number of his books, including the newer ones. You know, I thought he had retired, so I stopped reading, but then I realized in that time he had written a whole bunch more books.

So love Stephen King and what I love about him the most. And I think what he taught me the most was the importance of characterization. Because his premise, his premises are scary, but you know, *Cujo* is like a dog barking outside of your car for 400 to 500 pages. And that's only interesting if you believe in those characters.

[00:03:05] **Lissa Jones:** Excellent point, excellent point. I hadn't thought of it quite that way. Speaking of horror, being a way of dealing with things, you talked about the fact that your mom used horror to deal with the traumas of Jim Crow and activism, and that you use horror to deal with the loss of your mother. And I lost my mother too I'm particularly interested. Will you tell me more about that..

[00:03:27] **Tananarive Due:** Yeah, I'm very sorry. First of all, to hear about the loss of your mother. We understand that mortality is real, but I think it really is kind of hard to wrap our mind around loss, like someone with a big presence, like a parent that has always been there. That absence is, is almost incomprehensible.

So, um, Unlike my mother, I hadn't really experienced a lot of trauma in my young adulthood when she was a young adult, when she went to Florida A&M university in Tallahassee, she and her sister, my aunt Priscilla, Stephen Causa got involved in the civil rights movement through an organization called CORE the Congress of racial equality, and they learned nonviolent tactics to start sit in.

So they went to the Woolworths in Tallahassee. And had a Sit in. And this was after Greensboro. They were inspired by Greensboro. They were ready and they were arrested. And this began her years long, civil rights activism in the sixties. That right away began with a police officer throwing tear gas in her face. And was saying, I want you, and she wore dark glasses for her entire adult life, even indoors because she had this sensitivity to light.

So when Ferguson happened, you know, in a more contemporary setting, and I heard these stories about people being teargassed, it had a really personal effect on me because I know that tear gas is a chemical weapon and it has lasting effects. And so she had this very physical trauma. From her activism, but what didn't show was the emotional trauma.

And I really do feel my mother was in her early getting to a mid seventies when she passed away. And I feel like she could have been here longer. I really feel like that trauma knotted up inside of her anger -fear, watching the clock turned back which she didn't live to see, but she could see coming, uh, all that I think cut her life short and it was only later I made that connection.

Oh, Maybe that's why she loved horror movie so much. I mean, it took me a long time to make this connection., when we let her babysit our son, when he was about three, he came home talking about demons and I'm just like, oh right, grandma. Cause she had him watching charmed, just like she had us watching all these horror movies, uh, creature features probably too young to be watching myself.

So it was true to brand. And she's always loved horror and, and she always did love it. And, and there there's even been a study about horror as a way to confront trauma, uh, that people who like horror had an easier time dealing with 20 20, you know, the start of COVID because on some level. We're kind of practicing.

And I think that's kind of why I write it. A whatever's happening in my books. Trust me. It's usually way worse than anything that's happening in real life. So there's that comfort, but B I'm always trying to create these characters to force them, to react to circumstances they don't understand, like you're confronted with something that you, what in the world is happening.

What are these nightmares mean? Wasn't I wearing a, it didn't my jacket. Wasn't my jacket in the closet. When I went to bed, why is it, you know, and all this kind of like confusion and watch them sort of rise to the challenge or try to, they

don't always succeed, but it really does help me feel stronger to create characters who have to really rise to the challenge, whatever the challenge is,

[00:06:41] **Lissa Jones:** Your book is called *The Between* in a nutshell, if you had to tell people what it was about, how would you describe it?

[00:06:48] **Tananarive Due:** Uh, I've been practicing this elevator pitch. So yes, it's, uh, it's basically about a man who was supposed to die when he was a child. And ever since then, he's been played by night terrors and these nightmares basically signaling that death is trying to catch up to him. And whenever he wakes up from these nightmares, he's in a slightly different reality than the one he went to sleep in.

It's an alternate reality, not. That is real. That is not imaginary. Some readers wonder is he just imagining that he's in an alternate reality as I wrote it? No, he is actually like if he went to sleep in a blue shirt, he might wake up in a red shirt because he's literally not quite in the same reality.

And he has to figure all this out at the same time, a white supremacist is threatening to kill his wife and his family. So that is *The Between* in a nutshell.

[00:07:39] **Lissa Jones:** Let's talk about the character, Hilton. Tell us a little bit about Hilton and a little bit about the other people in his life.

[00:07:49] **Tananarive Due:** Sure. You know, it's interesting. Before I started *The Between*, I had gone through a phase after graduate school and creative writing classes where I was writing White characters, white male characters often. And *The Between* was a breakthrough in that I was trying to write about a family, more like my own. I had never seen this particular family in literature, a black family living in the suburbs that was not sort of a go-to for most writers.

I had read, I loved Alice Walker and Tony Morrison and Stephen King, but my characters were not in those books in the way that I grew up. So it was kind of a walk of faith to try to create a character. And I picked a male probably because I was still learning to write closer to myself. I mean, I had been writing white males now, at least I was writing a Black male. So he's very much modeled on my father to a degree who is still living. He's a civil rights attorney. Always out in the community when I was growing up, lots of meetings, helping people, those real life conflicts bled into my story in terms of the wife day day, who really resents her husband's public life.

When she feels. He's neglecting the personal life. And this is something that's very common with activists by the way, because you really do get immersed in the struggle. And the struggle is never ending. I mean, there is no end to things that we can protest and work to fix. So without very firm boundaries, a lot of the activists, my parents knew in the sixties ended up not really supervising their own kids. The kids were getting in trouble, their kids. So, so that was part of real life. And as I said, based on the cues from King, especially in horror, I just wanted them to be real people and that meant flaws and all, right. So when I'm rereading *The Between*, and the first chapter we meet Hilton, he's in this awkward situation with a young woman, he's helping to move.

I'm like, holy cow, I'm not sure I would've started a book like that today because it's like flying in the face of. Shortcomings and all of his flaws, if you want to like this guy. But I did, I created him as a flawed character. His wife day has some legitimate struggles, but she's also overly jealous.

She has her flaws and the two kids who, even though I didn't have any brothers, the kids very much represent who my sisters Janita and Lydia were when we were growing up. We were that. Where sometimes the neighbors would throw something in your yard because they didn't like the color of your skin. We were that, that family integrating a neighborhood.

And yes, my father did receive a warning from the FBI once that he should be careful opening any packages, because there was a terrorist mailing bombs to judges and lawyers. So all of that got wrapped into the story and into those characters, they basically are kind of like my family and our circumstances during the integration era.

[00:10:54] **Lissa Jones:** I can't thank you enough. That tells me so much more than I knew when I began this conversation with you. Well, can we give our listeners a treat? Would you do us a favor?

[00:11:07] **Tananarive Due:** The prologue takes place in 1963. Hilton was seven when his grandmother died and it was a bad time, but it was worse when she died again, Hilton called her Nana.

But her real name was Eunice Kelly. She raised Hilton by herself in rural Florida and Belle Glade, which was 40 miles from Palm beaches, rich white folks who live like characters in the storybook. They shared a two room house with a rusty tin roof, a road named for Frederick Douglas, the road wasn't paved and the stones hurt Hilton's tender feet whenever he walked back. Douglas road

was bounded by tomato fields behind an old barbed wire fence. Nana told him never to touch because he might get something she called tetanus and they couldn't afford a doctor. Hilton knew they were poor, but he never felt deprived because he had everything. Even as young as he was Hilton understood the difference.

Nana had been a migrant worker for years, so she had muscles like a man on her shoulders and forearms, Nana always saved her money and she played the organ for pay at the church the monied Blacks attended cross town. So she hadn't harvested sugar cane or pick string beans alongside the Puerto Ricans and Jamaicans.

And along time Hilton worship. She was his whole world. He didn't know anything about his parents, except that they were gone and he didn't miss them. He didn't think it was fair to his friends that they had mamas and daddies instead of a Nana. Nana always said she didn't intend for Hilton to end up in the field.

So there were bigger things in store for him. So she sent him to school instead. She had taught him to read before he ever walked through the doorway of the colored school, a half mile away. And it was when he came home from school on a hot may afternoon that his life was changed forever. He found Nana sprawled across her clean swept kitchen floor.

Eyes closed, a white scarf wrapped around her head. She wasn't moving and not a sound came from. Hilton didn't panic just yet because Nana was old and sometimes fainted from heat when she tried to act younger. So he knelt beside her and shook her, calling her name that worked by itself. Sometimes.

Otherwise he'd have to find her. But when he touched her forearm, he drew his hand away with a cry, even with the humidity and the little house and the steam from pots boiling over on top of the stove, their lids bouncing like angry demons. Nana's flesh felt as cold as just drawn well, water as cold as December, he'd never touched a person who felt that way.

And even as a child, he knew only dead people turned cold. Like. Hilton stumbled to his feet and ran, crying outside to find a grownup who could help. He was only half seeing because of his tears banging on door after door, on Douglas road, yelling through the screens, finding no one home after each door,

his sobs rose higher and his throat closed up a little more tightly until he could barely breathe.

It was as though everyone were simply gone. Now, no one was left with. He felt like he tried a hundred houses and all he'd found was barking dogs. The barking and running made him feel dizzy. He could hardly catch his breath anymore, just like he would die himself in truth. There were only six houses on Douglas road.

The last belong to Zeke Higgs, a Korean war veteran, angry with Midland. Angry with white folks and whom no child with sense would bother on any other day because he kept a switch by his door. Zeke appeared like a shadow behind a screen. When Hilton came pounding and crying, Zeke scooped Hilton under his arm and ran to the house.

When he got home Hilton's childhood flew from him. Nana was no longer lying lifeless on the kitchen floor. She was standing over the kitchen stove, stirring pots. And the first thing she said was I wondered where you'd run off to boy. She looked at Zeke's face and nodded at him. Then she fixed her eyes on Hilton.

I'm afraid Nana has made a mess of supper. You all right. Mrs. Kelly? Zeke asked studying her face. Hilson did the same. She was perspiring and her cheeks were redder than usual underneath her finecocoa colored skin. Just fine. I've had a fainting spell is all. I hope Hilton didn't send you into a fright.

[00:15:28] **Lissa Jones:** That was That was Tananarive Due, reading from *The Between*.

[00:15:35] **Derek Emery:** {music} You're listening to Black Market Reads a series of conversations highlighting the Black literary voices of today. Join the conversation. For more great content about authors you love visit [us@blackmarketreads.com](mailto:us@blackmarketreads.com). Your opinion counts. Let us know what you think. Share us with your friends rate and review us on apple podcasts.

[00:16:03] **Lissa Jones:** Let's talk a little bit about *The Between*. In our first segment, you talked about the fact that the book was first released in 1995. Why was it rereleased in 2021?

[00:16:16] **Tananarive Due:** Well, there are probably a lot of reasons for that. I would say primary among those reasons is that black horror has become a much better known subject.

Then it was when I published this book, in fact, black horror was not in on some shock what I published *The Between*. So after Jordan Peal's *Get Out* in 2017, that has opened a lot of doors in Hollywood. And I also think I'm a literary side of Victor Laval. Who's been publishing some fantastic horror, *The Ballad of Black Tom* and *the Changeling*.

Other stories are part of that. And, and also probably the rise in the interest in what's known as Afrofuturism and Afrofuturism is the black speculative arts science fiction, fantasy horror, magical realism. *Black Panther* is Afrofuturism, right? So when you have huge film blockbusters, like *Get Out*. And *Black Panther*, like right after each other, and also all these great authors emerging on the literary side. And I executive produced a documentary about black horror for Shudder called *Horror Noire, A History of Black Horror*. It's based on an amazing book by Dr. Robin R. Mean's Coleman, which everyone who's interested should read. If you, if you want to know about the history of cinematic black horror, but all those things.

I think just the growing awareness and added level of, if I dare use the word pseudo celebrity, that comes, when you start doing film projects, you know, even a documentary, a lot of people have seen this. A lot of people I've had even Jodie foster or I was interviewing her for *vanity fair*. And she was like, oh, I'm a fan of *Horror Noire*.

And I was like, excuse me. Okay. So that, documentary really got a lot of publicity. A lot of people have watched it and I've been publishing *Black Horror* since 1995. And this was my first one. Harper Collins was my first publishing company. And I think they looked at sort of how the page has turned and like, wait a second. We need to reissue this book. That would be my theory. I really should ask my editor. Everyone asked me this. I should ask the folks at Harper Collins. Why did y'all rerelease this book? But I think that's. Well, I'm thrilled. They did. Let me just say that.

[00:18:27] **Lissa Jones:** Have you re-read it, since it was first released?

[00:18:31] **Tananarive Due:** Oh yes. I just recently re-read it to prepare for another interview. And also during the process of this adaptation, I was taking notes and rereading and trying to sort of take little quotes here and there from

the story that I might want to put in the script. So yeah, I have re-read it. And. It's an interesting experience, you know, almost 30 years later, there are definitely some things I would do differently.

I might've introduced Hilton's character a bit differently if I were writing it today, I'm not even sure I would have written it from a man's point of view. It might've been Dede's story. You know, I might've flipped the gender, but it is very much representative of where I was as a writer in what my interests were.

I have to say the thing that led directly to my writing *The Between* was hurricane Andrew in 1992, it really devastated large parts of south Florida where I was living. I did live in Miami. I did grow up in Miami, all that is in the book. So that contributed to my feeling that. Yeah, gone to sleep in one world and, and I woke up at another. It just looked at different, everything was different and it's a very jarring feeling. And as I do with most of my traumas and crises, I put it in my fiction. So it was like, what if, what if there was someone who did wake up in different realities? What would that mean and why would that be happening? And I thought, well, maybe he almost died.

[00:20:00] **Lissa Jones:** It's incredible to read your book. To be thinking about it in one way, and then to listen to you and really understand it so much differently is so much better. I just speaking of which, why do you think Hilton's story will resonate with people too?

[00:20:16] **Tananarive Due:** You know, it's ironic when a white supremacist figures in this story, and there's a highly, highly racist tenor to these threats that he is sending to Hilton's family, which I actually have toned down a bit in the TV adaptation.

Everything I'm found is just bigger and more. If you think you can say more with a whisper sometimes than a shout in TV and film, but in any case, I was worried that that was passe in 1995, I was worried that a white supremacist might not be a realistic villain. That seems something. Hey, now it's kind of funny now, in a tragic way because white supremacy is way more in fashion now than it was when I published *The Between* the 1995, which is a sad thing to say, it's not that it didn't exist. I make reference to a group called the order. That was a real group. You know, they killed a DJ. Um, and the Pacific Northwest, the Pacific Northwest is still out of control in terms of white supremacy.

So it was there, but it wasn't front and center. We hadn't just had a so-called president who actually courted that vote that rode in on a tide of hatred to get

into the white house in the same way. I mean, kind of, yeah, we had a with Reagan, but not as openly as, as under the previous administration.

So reading it now, it is both really, really sad to me, but also in a weird way, validate. That, that was the villain. I chose that. That was the mouthpiece for death that, that I chose in, in 1995. And even then, soon after my book was either finished or published, I forget which it was the Oklahoma city bombing happened with Timothy McVeigh.

And I thought, oh, that's not passe. It's not over the top to wrote this, to write this book the way I did.

[00:22:10] **Lissa Jones:** This is fascinating to me. Who did you imagine would be your audience for this novel?

[00:22:15] **Tananarive Due:** I had no idea. I literally wrote a letter to my sister while I was working on it saying, do you think there would be an audience for a black horror novel? I didn't know. And as a matter of fact, I didn't know what The Between would be. The first book I would publish. I had been starting a lot of short stories and I started another novel that went 200 pages before I lost interest. And so everything I wrote was an exercise, just trying to get better. You know, this is the one that will teach me how to become a professional writer.

And it really did sit in a drawer for nine months before I got serious about trying to sell it. Cause I got a couple little rejections and I thought, okay, I'm not ready. And I just kept it moving. So it was a huge shock to me that in the nineties, because of Terry McMillan, which I would not have thought it was like Terry McMillan had had come out with Waiting to Exhale.

She'd had all this great success with commercial black fiction, you know, in a way that really open publishing's eyes to the fact that there were these book groups of women, primarily who would devour commercial fiction. And obviously I did not think a horror novel was necessarily going to be in that group, but I was so very fortunate.

To really benefit from that era, that any author, you talk to a Black author who was publishing in the nineties will describe it like a beautiful Renaissance. It's like being in the land of Oz. It was just you had a paperback tour at a hardcover tour. You were in the best hotels you, it was, you know, the Elan Harris was on the New York times bestseller list with regularity.

It was just such a beautiful, beautiful. And I have a former editor at Mala Nika Idera who frequently would say that rising tides lift all boats. And that's what it was. I turned my mill and created a tsunami and it lifted up a bunch of us in our boats and it was a beautiful time. And then it kind of receded, you know, it kind of receded and people had trouble getting contracts and, and all these kinds of things happen.

So it's been interesting to watch this interest in Black genre growing again, a groundswell. And I would say one thing that's different this time is that it's not just the black readers, just the black book groups. In fact, unfortunately we've lost a lot of our independent black bookstores, but somehow black horror is now entering the consciousness of white horror readers.

In a way that it had not quite, when I started, I did get some love from the Bram Stoker, uh, the Bernstorff awards nominated my second book for an award in the horror writers association. But in terms of just everyday readers who love horror, again, maybe Jordan Peele, Victor LaVelle, whatever, the reasons there's just so much more interest.

And unfortunately maybe George Floyd too, after George Floyd's murder. You know, there were so many commitments by corporations that have kind of faded, but I think readers have really kind of stuck to their commitment. I'm going to find a black woman author. Do you have any suggestions? I see this tweet every day from somebody like, who do you suggest as a black author I should be reading right now. And that interest is, is it's much more sort of universal than it was when I started.

[00:25:30] **Lissa Jones:** I think heaven, for that. Mental health is an issue that comes up in the book.. And it was interesting to read about a character who actually utilized therapy, a black man, you know, because we're always told that black people don't go to therapy.

So it was wonderful to see exactly if you know what you're doing, you better, you better go twice as many times as you need to go. But there's some ambiguity as to whether what Hilton is experiencing is the result of mental health issues or something supernatural or both. Do you see a tension between those two explanations?

[00:26:03] **Tananarive Due:** You know, it's natural. I think for the kind of claims that Hilton is making, he would get a mental health diagnosis. I mean, in any horror movie, anytime someone tries to tell people what they're seeing or

experiencing, they get these blank stares. Like, are you okay? Do you need to talk to someone? And I think that's just real. Even if I just said, I saw a glass of water slide across the table, that's, you know, I may not be much of a special effect in a horror movie, but in real life, that would be scary as hell. And if I told people that happened, clearly they would think I either imagined it or there's some other explanation.

So I think they compliment each other. I did have a book club, very earnestly argued to me that they were convinced that Hilton was schizophrenic and that it was not supernatural. Look art is in the eye of the beholder, so I can't tell people what is really happening. If what they think is happening is different.

I can't just go have a conversation with every reader to change their mind so I can see why readers would think it's mental health. I can understand why Dede was, was relieved to have a diagnosis. At least now she knows what she's dealing with, you know, and that's how I feel if I, if there's a problem, it's much harder for me to grapple with it, unless there's some kind of label or plan of action.

That's when I'm looking for, what do we do at least a diagnosis gives you a path toward an action whereas Death chasing you when you're asleep does not leave you a lot of room for fighting back.

[00:27:35] **Lissa Jones:** There seems to be renewed mainstream interest in black horror stories in recent years. And you talked about the reasons you thought potentially Jordan Peele and others, Terry McMillan in the nineties, in the Breakthrough. What do you think audiences gained by engaging with black horror specifically?

[00:27:52] **Tananarive Due:** Well, first of all, we're only on this planet for a limited amount of time. And I think it's a pretty good idea to get to know as much about the people we're sharing this planet with as we can. And if you love horror, this is one of the things I love about, about Shudder and I, it's not really a plug, but it is a plug cause they're doing a black horror anthology series, including two adaptations I co-wrote with my husband, Stephen Barnes and a network is, is only going to do that. If they feel like it's going to have crossover appeal and what you'll notice on a streamer like Shudder is they have a horror movie from Guatemala called La (?). They have indigenous horror from Canada. They have horror from Asia and horror fans want to be scared. So it's a value to me as a horror fan to watch a foreign language. And foreign culture

horror movie, because it's going to scare me in ways that I haven't seen a million times already. You know, it's not a reboot of the, it's not reheated.

It's not the same thing I watched when I was in high school. It's the monster like the Grudge is a great example. The monster appears in ways that are surprising.. From angles we're not expecting. The architecture is different in Japan, all that, it's just all that contributes to that sense of being in uneasy territory, which is what you want in horror.

So I think horror really does lend itself to inclusion of all kinds of groups. And I really feel like horror fans are discovering that. So sure. Some black horror in the vein of Get Out will be about racism as the monster. And some white viewers might not like being reminded of white supremacy and the history and impact of white supremacy, but that's not what all black horror is.

Sometimes it's just, the character happens to be black. There's a slight difference in sensibility and approach. You know, all the jokes we make about how black characters would act in horror movies, the old Richard Pryor, Eddie Murphy, Cedric the entertainer jokes about how we run. And when you see someone running, we run, we don't ask questions, right?

So you're not going to see black people, like "hello", you know, and all that kind of stuff. I mean, that's all, that's all great for jokes, but it'd be interesting to see how it plays out when we actually do start to have more black driven horror. I know in my scripts, if my characters heard a weird noise, they picked up a weapon. Every single time. Nobody's walking around barefoot naked, in the house. calling out "hello" unarmed. So I think that they run maybe faster, they flee. So all those are stereotypes, but what's interesting is, and this is where it's interesting to engage with other cultural sensibilities. The reason there's a stereotype that black people would just run is because very often as in my personal family history, or going back to my grandmother's generation, we've heard stories about being threatened and people, your neighbors hating you and having to flee. So we haven't had the luxury of sort of a casual curiosity when we think something might be wrong, right? Like when the police stop us, there's a different racing of the heart. That maybe I would feel as a white, suburban soccer mom, right?

No one likes to be pulled over. That's universal, but what happens when you're pulled over is not universal and that window into a different cultural sensibility. Again, it just enriches the story. It enriches the characters, it makes it fresh. And

if it's scary, it's going to be even scarier than something you've seen a million times.

[00:31:29] **Lissa Jones:** That makes complete sense. And I think to myself, recording this podcast in the place where George Floyd was murdered. Just how that changed, what the world thought about, what happens to black people after the police stop us.,

[00:31:43] **Tananarive Due:** But will they remember is the question, you know, we just had a, the passage of an infrastructure bill and includes a whole lot of police funding and from what I understand, prohibitions against, removing funds from police departments and this kind of thing.

I really do feel like the diet of, of what people call cop agenda, which is, you know, cop shows where for all of our lives, you're watching TV where the police officer thoughtful patient and fair drop it. Son, you have so much to live for. No one said that to Tamir Rice before they shot him in Cleveland.

Noone said, you have so much to live for before you drop your toy gun, by the way. And he was shot to death. So. It's a fantasy or maybe that's how it happens at the suburbs. Okay. But that is not how it happens for most of us. And this mismatch, you know, cognitive dissonance between what people believe policing is and what it actually is, especially when it has to do with the policing of black and brown people is a huge problem that unfortunately, one more murder, even with a conviction is not going to solve.

In my mind. I think they've sadly, already figured. It seems that way until then there'll be another person inevitably. I mean, but of course there'll be another person because these systems are in place. And in a lot of ways, we are the very picture as black people of what police think they're supposed to be doing.

Like, they're supposed to be keeping us out or keeping us in or something, but we are the very picture of what they think their job description is. We are on face guilty of something.

[00:33:23] **Lissa Jones:** Before I ask you to finish reading the prologue. If you wouldn't mind, you wrote "black history is black horror". What did you mean?

[00:33:33] **Tananarive Due:** Well, you know, I think about my mother and those dark glasses, a 20 year old girl. And back in those days, she had this little bird like voice, very petite woman. I was taller than she was by the time I was

12. And the idea that an armed grown man would throw a tear gas canister in her face because he's so afraid of what she represents, not afraid of her, but afraid of the change she represents.

And there's so much hatred just sewn into our American flag. I think part of that is fear. Fear of being outnumbered, fear of being out voted. Fear of payback. I think our whole gun culture is fueled by fear payback. So all these things, are horrific. It's horrific as a parent to have to try to explain to your child what systemic racism is for the first time, because someone called them a name or a teacher treated them differently than another student, or they want to go out with their friends, but you're afraid they might see a police officer.

So we need to have the talk before you can go out with your friends, all that is a kind of trauma that that we have in our bones. You know, they, they say that ancestral memory is in our DNA, right? So when I say black history is black horror, I'm not talking about, you know, activists and, and historical figures. W.E.B. Dubois and Dr. King, I'm talking about the whipping, the shootings, the burnings, the imprisonment that continues now, families torn apart. Mothers and fathers locked away from their children. Children locked up because of schoolyard fights. It goes on and on and on that is HORROR..

[00:35:18] **Lissa Jones:** It is horror. It's a wonder black people survive. Yes. It's a wonder black people survive at all.

[00:35:25] **Tananarive Due:** We are incredible. We are. I mean, just the resilience. I think so often people look at the shortcomings and the what ifs and like if only, not taking into account so many forces directed in your way, you know, by the time you were a kid that you can't even imagine yourself doing certain things because they haven't been done before. So that's, what's really beautiful for me on, on just an artistic level about this new Renaissance in, in black art, which is not just horror, but it's also happening in horror. And for people who love horror, you get to be the hero or heroine of the story. You get to maybe survive in the end.

Maybe not, but maybe. You're not just the first to die or a sacrifice or comic relief.. And all those stereotypes that we've been relegated to because we weren't telling our own stories. And I really truly believe that the ability to tell our own stories is one of the keys to fixing all these problems.

One, not the only one, but in the arena of the imagination, you don't know what seeds you're planting in a young person when they read your book or see your film, uh, and that young person let go and change the way.

[00:36:36] **Lissa Jones:** Your daughter may go on to discover T-cells. Would you do us a favor of finishing the prologue?

[00:36:42] **Tananarive Due:** So where we last left Hilton, the neighbor had come and grandma was alive again. All right. Where did I leave off...

Zeke mumbled about how it wasn't a bother. Although he was annoyed. Hilton, barely noticed Zeke slipped back out of the house because his eyes were on Nana. His tiny hand, still tingled from the memory of the cold flesh he touched as unhuman as meat from the butcher. Nana's smiles and gentle manner frightened him in a way he didn't understand. He stood watching her, his tears still flowing. Nana glance at him several times over her shoulder while she tried to scrape burned stew from the bottom of her good iron sauce pan, the scraping sounded grating and insistent to Hilton. For the first time in his life Hilton wondered if Nana might ever do anything to try to hurt him. Finally, Nana said, you go on out of the way now, Hilton. Suppers late today. Don't get me that face. Now, pumpkin, Nana is not going to leave you. Hilton wanted to take Nana's fingers and squeeze them to see if they were, if the cold was still there, but she hadn't reached out to touch him and he wouldn't dare touch her if she did.

Hilton felt something had changed maybe forever. He went outside to play with a wheeled wagon he'd found, but he wasn't really playing. He was sitting on the front stoop, rocking the wagon back and forth in front of him, but he barely knew where he was or what he was doing. And as he'd sensed, things were different after that day, he found that on the kitchen floor. She began to wake up, crying out from bad dreams. He watched her get out of bed for a glass of water and the moon light her nightgown so soak with sweat he could see all the lines of her body as though she wore no clothes. Many nights Hilton went to sleep alone because Nana would stay up humming and writing hymns on the porch.

She said she did this because she couldn't sleep. Hilton knew the truth that she didn't want to. Maybe she hadn't met the boogeyman. It was fine with Hilton to be alone because it was hard for him to sleep with Nana there, her sleep breathing sounded different to him, the breaths longer and drawn farther and farther apart until he was sure the next one wasn't coming, but it always did.

Once he counted a minute between her breaths, he tried to hold his own breath that long, but he couldn't. Nana was confused all the time. Now she would get cross with him more easily than before. And she'd smack his backside for no good reason. One day Hilton was smacked when he didn't bring home cubes of sugar, he knew she had never asked him to bring. This went on for nearly a year.

And Hilton began to hate her. He was afraid of her for reasons he didn't know or want to know. She'd never hurt him. Not really, but on the, on the rare occasions he touched her. Now her skin did feel warm. But his memory of that day in the kitchen was too strong. All this changed the day Hilton took his first ride on a Greyhound sitting in the back, of course, when Nana and their Belle Glade cousins took him to Miami for the Kelly James family reunion. Twice before Nana had stayed home and his women cousins drove him to the reunions to meet his kin, but she decided to go this year. The smells coming from Nana's picnic basket and the wonder of the flat, endless Florida landscape through the bus window were enough to make Hilton, forget his fear.

The reunion, was at Virginia Key beach and Hilton had never seen any place like it. This was a beach in Miami for only colored people and folks of all shapes and shades had flocked there that day. Hilton had become a good swimmer in canals near Nana's house in Belle Glade, but he'd never seen so much sand and the trees and a green ocean stretching to forever.

He'd always been told the ocean was blue. So the sparkling green ribbons of current were a wonder to him. Anything could happen on a day like today? No one warned Hilton about the undertow and he wouldn't have understood if they had, but Nana did tell him he could only go to the water if he didn't go far, this would have been enough if Hilton had minded, like he should have. Nana who is helping the lady set up the picnic tables, pointed to the orange buoy, floating out in the water and said he could go only half way there, and Hilton said yes, Nana and ran splashing into the water, knowing he would go exactly where he wanted to, because in the water he would be free. He swim easily past the midway point to the bouy. And he could see from here that it was cracked and the glowing paint was old. He wanted to get a closer look at it, maybe grab it and tread water and gaze back and all those brown bodies on the sand. And it was here that he met up with the undertow.

It was friendly. At first, he felt as though the water had closed a grip around his tiny kicking legs and dumped him beneath the surface, like a donut, then spat

him back up a few feet from where he started. Hilton coughed and smiled splashing with his arms. He didn't know the water could do that by itself.

It was like taking a ride. The bouy was now farther than it was before the ocean played with him. It was off to his left. Now, when it should have been straight ahead. As Hilton waited to see if he could feel those swirling currents beneath him again, he heard splinters of Nana's voice in the wind, calling him from the beach "Hilton, you get back here, boy, you hear me get back here". So the ocean was not free after all Hilton realized he better do as he was told, or he wouldn't get any coconut cake or peach cobbler. If it wasn't too late for that already, he began sure strokes back toward the shore. The current still wanted to play.

And this time it was angry. He'll most trying to leave so soon. He felt the cold grip sieze his waist and hold his legs still. He was so startled. He gasped a big breath of air just in time to be plunged into the belly of the ocean. Tumbled upside down and then up again with water pounding all around his ears and a roar. Hilton tried to kick and stroke, but he didn't know which way was up or down.

And all he could see was the water all around him, specked with tiny ocean life, even in his panic Hilton knew not to open his mouth, but his lungs we're starting to hurt and the tumbling was never ending, Hilton believed he was being swept to the very bottom of the ocean or out to sea. As far as a ship he'd seen passing earlier.

Frantically he flailed his arms. He didn't hear Nana shout out from where she stood at the shoe. But he'd hear the story told many times later. There was no lifeguard that day, but there were plenty of Kelly and James men who followed Nana, who stripped herself of her dress and ran into the water. The woman hadn't been swimming in years, but her limbs didn't fail her this one time she needed to glide across the water.

The men follow the old woman into the sea. Hilton felt he couldn't hold his breath anymore. And the water mocked him all around. It filled his ears, his nose, and finally his mouth and his muscles began to fail. And it was then, just as he believed his entire 50 pound body would just fill with water that he felt an arm around his waist.

He fought the arm at first thinking it was another current, but the grip was firm and pulled him up up, up until he could see light. And Nana's weary, determined. That was all he saw because he went limp Finn. He would hear the

rest from others who told him in gentle ways about Sherri it's to the everlasting and that sort of thing.

One of the James men had been swimming closely behind Nana and she passed Hilton to his arms. Then she simply stopped swimming. They said, said maybe she just gave out Nana's head, began to sink below the water. And just as one of the Kelly men reached to try to take her arm, the current she'd pulled Hilton from took her instead. The man carrying Hilton could only swim against it with all his might toward the shore. Many people almost drown that day.

When Hilton senses came back to him and he was lying on the beach caked in gritty sand, all that was left of Nana was her good flower dress damp and crumpled at the water's edge.

So what the gifted old folks, the Seers often say is true. Sometimes the dead go unburied. And that's the prologue.

[00:44:57] **Lissa Jones:** Hmm. Thank you. That was Tananarive Due reading from *The Between*. Before we go, which I. I want to confess, I don't want to go. I want to talk a lot longer. Let's talk about black kids, swimming and drowning. It is such a significant thing that many people do not know that black people were once artisans of the sea. People who swam and were familiar with water and somehow kidnapped and brought to this country. We've been kept from our memories of water and our children drown as a result. How did that come to be a part of your book? What are your perspectives on this?

[00:45:42] **Tananarive Due:** Well, I was lucky in that my parents did have access to public pools and parks, and they would take us to, we had swimming lessons. We did go to the beach, I'm a rudimentary swimmer. I tell myself I could swim enough to save my life if I had to. But honestly I have a very deep fear of the water, which would not be surprising, especially the ocean, because unlike the tranquil swimming pool, The ocean has different temperaments and it can surprise you.

I once walked out to a sandbar, like weighted out like waist high water to a sandbar, and then as the high tide came. I had to swim back. That was scary. But that incident there is based on, yeah, one time I got swept under water. I felt myself scraped the, the ocean floor, the Sandy floor, and then before I could get back and that was just really, really scary.

So yeah, I was really mostly addressing that as personal fears, but you're very right to bring up the fact that so many of us ... Virginia Key was, was segregated. You know, that was one of the few places black people could even go to the beach. Swimming pools were segregated. There were vicious battles over not allowing black people to swim.

And even now, you know, post civil rights laws, people can tell when they're not wanted. You know, I'm thinking about an incident in Texas a few years ago, where high schoolers were harassed at a pool situation. So yeah, it's by no fault of their own many black children, don't learn how to swim and then they're very vulnerable to drowning.

So one thing I'm very happy about with my 17 year old is that we did grow up in a, in a housing, uh, community that had a community pool. And from the time, you know, he could walk almost, he was in the pool and he's a much better swimmer than, than either of his parents..

[00:47:24] **Lissa Jones:** Well, I'm delighted to know that because certainly we need all the black people we can, who know how to swim.

[00:47:30] **Tananarive Due:** Absolutely.

[00:47:33] **Lissa Jones:** What are you reading?

[00:47:34] **Tananarive Due:** The closest thing I could say to what I'm reading would be Sorrowland a novel by Rivers Solomon, which is unlike anything you've ever read. This is another writer who's coming of age during this, this new Renaissance. And speculative fiction. And there's a speculative element to this story. It's kind of a creature story, but it's also about history. It's about sociology. It's about blackness. It's about parenthood. It's about so many things. So I'm going to say I'm reading Sorrow by Rivers Solomon.

[00:48:06] **Lissa Jones:** Oh, I cannot. Thank you enough. I will pick it up. I know our listeners will pick it up. Tananarive Due is there anything you want our listeners to know from you that I didn't ask you today.

[00:48:17] **Tananarive Due:** For those who have been intrigued by this whole conversation about black horror and are just really learning about what it is. I do teach it at UCLA, but after Jordan Peele came to visit my class and kind of surprise my class, it sort of went viral.

So my husband, Steve and I created a private course, it's basically you download it and watch the videos, uh, called The Sunken Place, which is the same thing my UCLA classes called after Get Out. And if you want to just check out and see what it's about, it's at [www.sunkenplaceclass.com](http://www.sunkenplaceclass.com).

[00:48:52] **Lissa Jones:** Fantastic. First of all, I want to say thank you for having the insight, the vision and the courage to write the between in 1995. Thank you for whatever caused it to be rereleased. I'm just going to give it up to the ancestors as goodness. Thank you for your time today and your beautiful insights. And thank you so much for sharing yourself with our listening audience..

I hope to interview you again sometime on Black Market Reads.

[00:49:21] **Tananarive Due:** Well, thank you so much for inviting me. This was lovely and I, and I enjoyed it.

[00:49:25] **Lissa Jones:** Oh, well, the pleasure and the privilege were all mine. You can see I'm tongue tied. You take care of yourself and thank you, author Due. We'll see you again. Soon.

[00:49:35] **Derek Emery:** [music} Black Market Reads is produced by the Givens foundation for African-American literature in partnership with iDream.tv. Black market reads is made possible through the generous support of our individual donors, their target foundation, and the voters of Minnesota through the Minnesota state arts board with support from the arts and cultural heritage fund.

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