



***LONG WALK
HOME***

a novel by

JOHN L. LANSDALE

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This novel is a work of fiction. All incidents and characters are fictionalized, with the exception that well-known historical and public figures are products of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Where real-life historical figures appear, the situations and dialogues concerning those persons are fictional and are not intended to depict actual events within the fictional confines of the story. In all other respects, any resemblance to persons living or dead is entirely coincidental.

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What Others are Saying about John L. Lansdale

A “page-turner...Lansdale effectively delays revealing the novel’s big secret until the end. Those who like their thrillers with a heavy dose of violent action will be satisfied.”

- *Publishers Weekly* review of *Slow Bullet*

“This is an entertaining, science fiction-historical-horror blend with resourceful protagonists and a solid cast of secondary characters.” - *Booklist* review of *Zombie Gold*

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- TV personality Joan Hallmark review of *Zombie Gold*

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- *Cemetery Dance* review of *Hell's Bounty*

“True to Lansdale tradition, John L. Lansdale has compiled a piece of work that should appeal to a wide range of readers.” - *Amazing Stories* review of *Zombie Gold*

LONG WALK

HOME

*In joyful memory of
Buddy and O'Reta Lansdale.
The best parents a boy could have.
They did it with love.*

“An old young man will be a young old man.”
Benjamin Franklin

PART ONE
WHAT'S IN A NAME

(1)

I had never seen Beau in a suit and tie before. I was glad I got a chance to say goodbye. In my memory I could see him running like the wind through Mama's pasture on those hot summer days in 1944 when we were ten. My grandma used to say it was a shame the good Lord didn't put that speed in his head instead of his feet.

As I sat there, waiting for the funeral service to start, the memories of that last summer on the farm were as clear as if it happened yesterday.

It was a life-changing time for all of us in Angel Point, Mississippi, though it started out like any other.

I had my chores, but I didn't have to go to school, do homework, wear shoes or, best of all, help Beau Sterling with his arithmetic.

Almost everyone old enough was off fighting Germans in the war. Seemed everyone else worked at the canning factory or on one of the farms around Angel Point. It was

JOHN L. LANSDALE

where General Sherman crossed on his way to Vicksburg during the Civil War.

Not much ever changed until the summer of 1944, when everything changed forever.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw a pretty young lady with a small boy walk up beside me.

"Mr. O'Rourke?" she said as I stood up.

"Yes ma'am," I said.

"Thought so. I saw your name on the guest list," she said. "My name's Helen Massy. My grandpa Beau thought a lot of you. I know it was difficult getting to Alaska in this weather. Thank you for coming."

"We were best friends as boys," I said.

"It was my grandpa's suggestion I name my boy Trenton after you," she said. "Maybe we can talk more after the funeral?"

"I would enjoy that," I said and patted little Trenton on the shoulder. Helen nodded and led Trenton back to their seats.

I sat back down in the pew and noticed from the open casket Beau had his pilot wings pinned on. Every now and then someone would walk by and touch or rub the wings. With the delay in the funeral from waiting for more guests to arrive, the wings might not be on his chest by the time the funeral started.

Beau wasn't his real name but they called him that because his sister came along five years before he did. Mr. Sterling's name was Henry and they weren't sure they would have a boy. He wanted a junior, so they named the girl Henrietta and called her Henry. When Beau was born, Mr. Sterling still wanted a junior, so Beau was named Henry Alexander Sterling Jr. Three Henrys was a bit much, so his sister started calling him Beau, short for brother, and that's how Beau got his name.

LONG WALK HOME

The deeper I went into my memories the more I thought about my own family.

They called my father Buzz because he once worked in a saw mill. My mother's name was Elizabeth and they called her Liz. She died when I was five from some kind of heart problem that Doc Crawford said she was born with. Aunt Sara Beth was the only one without a nickname. My mother and Aunt Sara Beth were raised by their grandmother. Their mom and dad were killed in a bus wreck when mother and Aunt Sara Beth were little. I called my only grandparent Mama. She liked Mama better than grandma because that's what my daddy and uncle called her.

My Uncle Earl was away fighting Germans somewhere. He didn't have a nickname now but Mama said when he was little everyone called him Squirrel because he was always trying to make people laugh.

A man wearing a bearskin coat walked by me toward the casket and broke my train of thought with a whiff of his coat. Most of the people at the funeral were wearing heavy fur coats. The only way to and from town this far north was by air.

As I looked around the pews at the rest of the crowd, the young lady I met earlier shrugged her shoulders to indicate we were still waiting and smiled. I lip synced the words "No problem." She nodded and smiled again and I returned to my memories to wait.