



Blood Price (Blood Books)

By Tanya Huff

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The Blood Books are now available in "Blood Ties" TV tie-in editions.

Vicki Nelson, formerly of Toronto's homicide unit and now a private detective, witnesses the first of many vicious attacks that are now plaguing the city of Toronto. As death follows unspeakable death, Vicki is forced to renew her tempestuous relationship with her former partner, Mike Celluci, to stop these forces of dark magic—along with another, unexpected ally...

Henry Fitzroy, the illegitimate son of King Henry VIII, has learned over the course of his long life how to blend with humans, how to deny the call for blood in his veins. Without him, Vicki and Mike would not survive the ancient force of chaos that has been unleashed upon the world—but in doing so, his identity may be exposed, and his life forfeit.

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for the series:

“An interesting departure from the many vampire books now available. It provides **an entertaining and engrossing story** for leisure reading.”—*Kliatt*

“A suspenseful story that deals with the emotional content of the situation rather than the obvious potential for overt horror.”—*Science Fiction Chronicle*

“Huff has retained her humor along with her horror, her characters have continued to develop, and **her plots are quirky and original.**”—*VOYA*

“Explores the borders of death and beyond with an intensity that is only partially lightened by touches of ironic humor. Written with the author’s usual flair for realistic fantasy.”—*Library Journal*

“A yummy concoction of equal parts fantasy and mystery, throwing in a splash of humor and a dash of romance to beguile the palate quite delightfully.... Ms. Huff manages to develop all her different plot threads to marvelous effect. How could anyone resist this vastly entertaining pastiche?”—*RT Book Reviews*

About the Author

Tanya Huff may have left Nova Scotia at three, and has lived most of her life since in Ontario, but she still considers herself a Maritimer. On the way to the idyllic rural existence she shares with her partner Fiona Patton, six cats, and a chihuahua, she acquired a degree in Radio and Television Arts from Ryerson Polytechnic—an education she was happy to finally use while writing her recent *Smoke* novels. Of her previous twenty-three books, the five—*Blood Price*, *Blood Trail*, *Blood Lines*, *Blood Pact*, *Blood Debt*—featuring Henry Fitzroy, bastard son of Henry VIII, romance writer, and vampire are among the most popular.

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One Tucking her chin down into her coat—it might be April but it was still damp and cold, with no sign of spring—Vicki Nelson stepped off the Eglinton bus and into the subway station. She was halfway down the first set of stairs leading to the southbound platform when she heard the scream. Or rather the half-scream. It choked off in mid-wail. One leap took her to the first landing. From where she stood, she could see only half of each platform through the glass and no indication of which side the trouble was on. The south was closer, faster. Bounding down two, and then three steps at a time she yelled, “Call the police!” Even if no one heard her, it might scare off the cause of the scream. Nine years on the force and she’d never used her gun. She wanted it now. In nine years on the force she’d never heard a scream like that. “What the hell do you think you’re doing?” the more rational part of her brain shrieked. “You don’t have a weapon! You don’t have backup! You don’t have any idea of what’s going on down there! Eight months off the force and you’ve forgotten everything they ever taught you! What the hell are you trying to prove?” Vicki ignored the voice and kept moving. Maybe she was trying to prove something. So what. When she exploded out onto the platform, she immediately realized she’d chosen the wrong side and for just an instant, she was glad of it. A great spray of blood arced up the orange tiles of the station wall, feathering out from a thick red stream to a delicate pattern of crimson drops. On the floor below, his eyes and mouth open above the mangled ruin of his throat, lay a young man. No: the body of a young man. The dinner she’d so recently eaten rose to the back of

Vicki's throat, but walls built during the investigations of other deaths slammed into place and she forced it down. The wind in the tunnel began to pick up and she could hear the northbound train approaching. It sounded close. Sweet Jesus, that's all we need. At 12:35 on a Sunday night it was entirely possible that the train would be nearly empty, no one would get off, and no one would notice the corpse and the blood-spattered wall down at the southernmost end of the northbound platform. Given the way of the world, however, it was more likely that a group of children and a little old lady with a weak heart would pile out of the last carriage and come face-to-face with the staring eyes and mutely screaming mouth of a fresh corpse. Only one solution presented itself. The roar of the train filled the station as, heart pounding and adrenaline singing in her ears, Vicki leapt down onto the southbound tracks. The wooden step over the live rail was too far away, almost centered in the line of concrete pillars, so she jumped, trying not to think of the however many million volts of electricity the thing carried turning her to charcoal. She tottered for a moment on the edge of the divider, cursing her full-length coat and wishing she'd worn a jacket, and then, although she knew it was the stupidest thing she could do, she looked toward the oncoming train. How did it get so close? The light was blinding, the roar deafening. She froze, caught in the glare, sure that if she continued she'd fall and the metal wheels of the beast would cut her to shreds. Then something man-height flickered across the northbound tunnel. She didn't see much, just a billowing shadow, black against the growing headlight, but it jerked her out of immobility and down onto the track. Cinders crunched under her boots, metal rang, then she had her hands on the edge of the platform and was flinging herself into the air. The world filled with sound and light and something brushed lightly against her sole. Her hands were sticky, covered with blood, but it wasn't hers and at the moment that was all that mattered. Before the train stopped, she'd flung her coat over the body and grabbed her ID. The center-man stuck his head out. Vicki flipped the leather folder in his direction and barked, "Close the doors! Now!" The doors, not quite open, closed. She remembered to breathe again and when the center-man's head reappeared, snapped, "Have the driver get the police on the radio. Tell them it's a 10-33...never mind what that means!" She saw the question coming. "They'll know! And don't forget to tell them where it is." People had done stupider things in emergencies. As he ducked back into the train, she looked down at her card case and sighed, then lifted one gory finger to push her glasses back up her nose. A private investigator's ID meant absolutely nothing in a case like this, but people responded to the appearance of authority, not the particulars. She moved a little farther from the body. Up close, the smell of blood and urine—the front of the boy's jeans was soaked—easily overcame the metallic odors of the subway. A lone face peered out through the window of the closest car. She snarled at it and settled down to wait. Less than three minutes later, Vicki heard the faint sound of sirens up on the street. She almost cheered. It had been the longest three minutes of her life. She'd spent them thinking, adding together the spray of blood and the position of the body and not liking the total. Nothing that she knew of could strike a single blow strong enough to tear through flesh like tissue paper and fast enough that the victim had no time to struggle. Nothing. But something had. And it was down in the tunnels. She twisted until she could see into the darkness beyond the end of the train. The hair on the back of her neck rose. What did the shadows hide, she wondered. Her skin crawled, not entirely because of the cold. She'd never considered herself an overly imaginative woman and she knew the killer had to be long gone, but something lingered in that tunnel. The distinctive slam of police boots against tile brought her around, hands held carefully out from her sides. Police called to a violent murder, finding someone covered in blood standing over the body, could be excused if they jumped to a conclusion or two. The situation got chaotic for a few minutes, but fortunately four of the six constables had heard of "Victory" Nelson and after apologies had been exchanged all around, they got to work. "...my coat over the body, had the driver call the police, and waited." Vicki watched Police Constable West scribbling madly in his occurrence book and hid a grin. She could remember being that young and that intense. Barely. When he looked up, she nodded at the body and asked, "Do you want to see?" "Uh, no!" After a second he added, a little sheepishly, "That is, we shouldn't disturb anything before homicide gets here." Homicide. Vicki's stomach lurched and her mood nose-dived. She'd forgotten she wasn't in charge. Forgotten she was nothing more than a witness—first on the scene and that only because she'd done some pretty stupid things to get there. The uniforms had made it seem like old times but

homicide...her department. No, not hers any longer. She pushed her glasses up her nose with the back of her wrist. PC West, caught staring, dropped his gaze in confusion. "Uh, I don't think anyone would mind if you cleaned the blood off your hands." "Thanks." Vicki managed a smile but ignored the unasked question. How well she could see, or how little she could see, was nobody's business but hers. Let another round of rumors start making its way through the force. "If you wouldn't mind grabbing a couple of tissues out of my bag...." The young constable dipped a tentative hand into the huge black leather purse and actually looked relieved when he removed it holding the tissue and still in possession of all his fingers. Vicki's bag had been legendary throughout Metro and the boroughs. Most of the blood on her hands had dried to reddish brown flakes and the little that hadn't the tissue merely smeared around. She scrubbed at it anyway, feeling rather like Lady MacBeth. "Destroying the evidence?" Celluci, she thought. They had to send Celluci. That bastard always walked too quietly. She and Mike Celluci had not parted on the best of terms but, by the time she turned to face him, she managed to school her expression. "Just trying to make life more difficult for you." The voice and the smile that went with it were patently false. He nodded, an overly long curl of dark brown hair falling into his face. "Always the best idea to play to your strengths." Then his eyes went past her to the body. "Give your statement to Dave." Behind him, his partner waved two fingers. "I'll talk to you later. This your coat?" "Yeah, it's mine." Vicki watched him lift the edge of the blood-soaked fabric and knew that for the moment nothing existed for him but the body and its immediate surroundings. Although their methods differed, he was as intense in the performance of his duties as she was—had been, she corrected herself silently—and the undeclared competition between them had added an edge to many an investigation. Including a number neither of them were on. "Vicki?" She unclenched her jaw and, still scrubbing at her hands, followed Dave Graham a few meters up the platform. Dave, who had been partnered with Mike Celluci for only a month when Vicki left the force and the final screaming match had occurred, smiled a little self-consciously and said, "How about we just do this by the book?" Vicki released a breath she didn't know she'd been holding. "Sure, that'd be fine." Taking refuge from emotions in police procedure—a worldwide law enforcement tradition. While they talked, the subway train, now empty of passengers, pulled slowly out of the station. "...responding to the scream you ran down onto the southbound platform, then crossed the tracks in front of a northbound train to reach the body. While crossing the tracks..." Inwardly, Vicki cringed. Dave Graham was one of the least judgmental men in existence, but even he couldn't keep his opinion of that stunt from showing in his voice. "...you saw a man-shaped form in what appeared to be a loose, flowing garment cross between you and the lights. Is that it?" "Essentially." Stripped of all the carefully recorded details, it sounded like such a stupid thing to have done. "Right." He closed the notebook and scratched at the side of his nose. "You, uh, going to stick around?" Vicki squinted as the police photographer snapped off another quick series of shots. She couldn't see Mike, but she could hear him down in the tunnel barking commands in his best "God's gift to the Criminal Investigations Bureau" voice. Down in the tunnel... The hair on the back of her neck rose again as she remembered the feeling of something lingering, something dark and, well if she had to put a name to it, evil. She suddenly wanted to warn Celluci to be careful. She didn't. She knew how he'd react. How she'd react if their positions were reversed. "Vicki? You sticking around?" It was on the tip of her tongue to say no, that they knew where to find her if they needed further information, but curiosity—about what the police would find, about how long she could remain so close to the job she'd loved and not fall apart—turned the no into a grudging, "For a while." She'd be damned if she'd run away. As she watched, Celluci came up the stairs onto the platform and spoke to the ident man, sweeping one arm back along the tracks. The ident man protested that he needed a certain amount of light to do his job, but Celluci cut him off. With a disgusted snort, he picked up his case and headed for the tunnel. Charming as ever, Vicki thought as Celluci scooped her coat off the floor and made his way toward her, detouring slightly around the coroner's men who were finally zipping the body into its orange plastic bag. "Don't tell me," she called as soon as he was close enough, her voice carefully dry, almost sarcastic, and hopefully showing no indication of the churning emotions that had her gut tied in knots. "The only prints on the scene are mine?" There were, of course, a multitude of prints on the scene, none of which had been identified—that was for downtown—but the bloody handprints Vicki had scattered around were

obvious."Dead on, Sherlock." He tossed her the coat. "And the blood trail leads into a workman's alcove and stops."Vicki frowned as she reconstructed what had to have happened just before she reached the platform. "You checked the southbound side?" "That's where we lost the trail." His tone added, Don't teach Grandpa to suck eggs. "What about the subway? You closed it for the night?" "Yeah." Mike waved toward the end of the platform. "I want Jake to dust that alcove." Intermittent flashes of light indicated the photographer was still at work. "It's not the sort of case where we can get in and out in a couple of minutes." He shoved his hands into his overcoat pockets and scowled. "Although the way the transit commission squawked you'd think we were shutting it down in rush hour to pick up someone for littering." "What, uh, sort of case is it?" Vicki asked—as close as she could get to asking if he, too, felt it, whatever it turned out to be. He shrugged. "You tell me; you seem to have gone to a great deal of trouble to land right in the middle of this." "I was here," she snapped. "Would you have preferred that I ignore it?" "You had no weapon, no backup, no idea of what was going down." Celucci ticked off an identical litany to the one she'd read herself earlier. "You can't have forgotten everything in eight months." "And what would you have done?" she spat through clenched teeth. "I wouldn't have tried to kill myself just to prove I still could." The silence that fell landed like a load of cement blocks and Vicki gritted her teeth under its weight. Was that what she'd been doing? She looked down at the toes of her boots, then up at Mike. At five ten she didn't look up to many men but Celluci, at six four, practically made her feel petite. She hated feeling petite. "If we're going to rehash my leaving the force again, I'm out of here." He held up both hands in a gesture of weary surrender. "You're right. As usual. I'm sorry. We're not going to rehash anything." "You brought it up." She sounded hostile; she didn't care. She should've followed her instincts and left the moment she'd given her statement. She had to have been out of her mind, putting herself in this position, staying in Celluci's reach. A muscle in his jaw jumped. "I said I was sorry. Go ahead, be superwoman if you want to, but maybe," he added, his voice tight, "I don't want to see you get killed. Maybe, I'm not willing to toss aside eight years of friendship...." "Friendship?" Vicki felt her eyebrows rise. Celluci drove his hands into his hair, yanking them through the curls, a gesture he used when he was trying very hard to keep his temper. "Maybe I'm not willing to toss aside four years of friendship and four years of sex because of a stupid disagreement!" "Just sex? That's it?" Vicki took the easy way out, ignoring the more loaded topic of their disagreement. A shortage of things to fight about had never been one of their problems. "Well, it wasn't just sex to me, Detective!" They were both yelling now. "Did I say it was just sex?" He spread his arms wide, his voice booming off the tiled walls of the subway station. "It was great sex, okay? It was terrific sex! It was... What?" PC West, his fair skin deeply crimson, jumped. "You're blocking the body," he stammered. Growling an inaudible curse, Celluci jerked back against the wall. As the gurney rolled by, the contents of the fluorescent orange bag lolling a little from side to side, Vicki curled her hands into fists and contemplated planting one right on Mike Celluci's classically handsome nose. Why did she let him affect her like this? He had a definite knack for poking through carefully constructed shields and stirring up emotions she thought she had under control. Damn him anyway. It didn't help that, this time, he was right. A corner of her mouth twitched up. At least they were talking again.... When the gurney had passed, she straightened her fingers, laid her hand on Celluci's arm and said, "Next time, I'll do it by the book." It was as close to an apology as she was able to make and he knew it. "Why start now." He sighed. "Look, about leaving the force; you're not blind, Vicki, you could have stayed...." "Celluci...." She ground his name through clenched teeth. He always pushed it just that one comment too far. "Never mind." He reached out and pushed her glasses up her nose. "Want a lift downtown?" She glanced down at her ruined coat. "Why not." As they followed the gurney up the stairs, he punched her lightly on the arm. "Nice fighting with you again." She surrendered—the last eight months had been a punitive victory at best—and grinned. "I missed you, too." **** "Good evening, Mr. Fitzroy." "Evening, Greg. Anything happening?" The security guard smiled and reached for the door release. "Quiet as a tomb, sir." Henry Fitzroy raised one red-gold eyebrow but waited until he had the door open and the buzzer had ceased its electronic flatulence before asking, "And how would you know?" Greg grinned. "Used to be a guard at Mount Pleasant Cemetery." Henry shook his head and smiled as well. "I should've known you'd have an answer." "Yes, sir, you should've. Good night, sir." The heavy glass door closed off any further conversation, so as Greg picked up his newspaper Henry

waved a silent good night and turned toward the elevators. Then he stopped. And turned back to face the glass.“VAMPIRE STALKS CITY.”Lips moving as he read, Greg laid the paper flat on his desk, hiding the headline.His world narrowed to three words, Henry shoved the door open.“You forget something, Mr. Fitzroy?”“Your paper. Let me see it.”Startled by the tone but responding to the command, Greg pushed the paper forward until Henry snatched it out from under his hands.“VAMPIRE STALKS CITY.”Slowly, making no sudden movements, Greg slid his chair back, putting as much distance as possible between himself and the man on the other side of the desk. He wasn’t sure why, but in sixty-three years and two wars, he’d never seen an expression like the one Henry Fitzroy now wore. And he hoped he’d never see it again, for the anger was more than human anger and the terror it invoked more than human spirit could stand.Please, God, don’t let him turn it on me.... The minutes stretched and paper tore under tightening fingers.“Uh, Mr. Fitzroy...”Hazel eyes, like frozen smoke, lifted from their reading. Held by their intensity, the trembling security guard had to swallow once, twice, before he could finish.“...you can, uh, keep the paper.”The fear in Greg’s voice penetrated through the rage. There was danger in fear. Henry found the carefully constructed civilized veneer that he wore over the predator and forced it back on. “I hate this kind of sensationalism!” He slapped the paper down on the desk.Greg jumped and his chair hit the back wall, ending retreat.“This playing on the fears of the public is irresponsible journalism.” Henry sighed and covered the anger with a patina of weary annoyance. Four hundred and fifty years of practice made the false face believable regardless of how uncomfortable the fit had grown lately. “They make us all look bad.”Greg sighed in turn and wiped damp palms on his thighs, snatching at the explanation. “I guess writers are kind of sensitive about that,” he offered.“Some of us,” Henry agreed. “You sure about the paper? That I can keep it?”“No problem, Mr. Fitzroy. I checked the hockey scores first thing.” His mind had already begun to dull what he had seen, adding rationalizations that made it possible, that made it bearable, but he didn’t slide his chair back to the desk until the elevator door had closed and the indicator light had begun to climb.Once in the condo, with the door safely closed behind him, he looked at the paper again and snarled.“VAMPIRE STALKS CITY.”The bodies of Terri Neal and DeVerne Jones had been found drained of blood.The headline appeared to be accurate.And he knew he wasn’t doing it.With a sudden snap of his wrist he flung the paper across the room and took a minor satisfaction in watching the pages flutter to the floor like wounded birds.“Damn. Damn. DAMN!”Crossing to the window, he shrugged out of his coat and tossed it on the couch, then yanked back the curtains that blocked the city from view. Vampires were a solitary breed, not seeking each other out nor keeping track of where their brothers and sisters roamed. Although he suspected he shared his territory with others of his kind, there could be a score moving, living, feeding among the patterns of light and shadow that made up the night and Henry would be no more aware of it than the people they moved among.And worse, if the killer was a vampire, it was a child, one of the newly changed, for only the newly changed needed blood in such amounts and would kill with such brutal abandon.“Not one of mine,” he said to the night, his forehead resting against the cool glass. It was as much a prayer as a statement. Everyone of his kind feared that they would turn loose just such a monster, an accidental child, an accidental change. But he’d been careful; never feeding again until the blood had had a chance to renew, never taking the risk that his blood could be passed back. He would have a child someday, but it would change by choice as he had done and he would be there to guide it, to keep it safe.No, not one of his. But he could not let it continue to terrorize the city. Fear had not changed over the centuries, nor had people’s reactions to it and a terrorized city could quickly bring out the torches and sharpened stakes...or the twentieth century laboratory equivalent.“And I no more want to be strapped to a table for the rest of my life than to have my head removed and my mouth stuffed with garlic,” he told the night.He would have to find the child, before the police did and their answer raised more questions than it solved. Find the child and destroy it, for without a blood bond he could not control it.“And then,” he raised his head and bared his teeth, “I will find the parent.”

Users Review

From reader reviews:

John Ashton:

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