



READING GUIDE

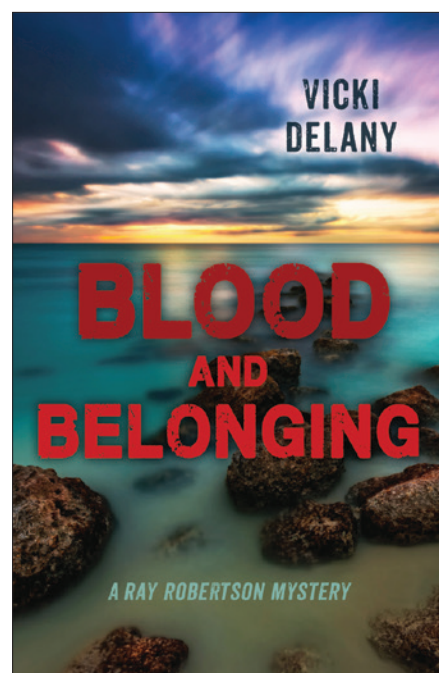
BLOOD AND BELONGING VICKI DELANY

Reading level: 2.5

Interest level: Adult

Themes: murder, the United Nations,
human smuggling, immigration, Caribbean,
crime fiction, police procedural

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Summary

When RCMP officer Ray Robertson discovers the body of a man floating off Grace Bay beach on the Caribbean island of Providenciales, he can't help getting involved—even though he's supposed to be on vacation and he knows his wife, Jenny, will be furious for him working during their precious time together.

Fully clothed and appearing to have been stabbed in the abdomen, the large man is young and fit. Robertson pulls him ashore, snaps a couple photos while gawkers gather, and waits until the authorities arrive. He checks the man's pockets for identification and discovers a plastic-bag-enclosed photograph of a teenaged boy who seems to resemble the dead man. A brother, he deduces. The paramedics and a police officer arrives. The police officer discourages Robertson's involvement despite Robertson identifying himself as a cop on assignment for the United Nations in nearby Haiti. The officer doesn't care about the dead guy: he's just one of hundreds of refugees who die off the coast every year, trying to flee Haiti for what traffickers promise them will be a better life in the United States.

With a shock, Robertson realizes that he recognizes the man: he had graduated from the police college in Haiti just two months back. Robertson asks Agent Pierre Lamothe, a Haitian officer who had worked with him, to give him more information about the man. Robertson can't imagine why the keen young officer would have been on a refugee boat headed for Turks and Caicos. He is certain Robert Savin wasn't a cop turned smuggler, like so many others. Robertson remembers meeting Savin's cousin and younger brother at the graduation ceremony—the latter a swaggering young rapper with plans to leave Haiti for the gold-paved lifestyle of the U.S. Robertson asks Lamothe to find out more about the cousin and brother, too.

At a restaurant that night, one of the paramedics Robertson had met earlier on the beach recognizes him and brings her friends over to sit down. The young woman mentions the body found floating in the water, alerting Jenny that Robertson is yet again putting his police work ahead of his marriage. The paramedic explains the common occurrence on Providenciales Island





of refugees fleeing Haiti for America in overcrowded, leaky boats, having paid money to criminals who then dump them and take off with their money. As slums spring up, crime rises and many illegals end up being trafficked—the men into construction; women and children into the sex trade.

Tension mounts as Robertson gets drawn farther into the suspicious death and as his wife's disappointment grows. Their special holiday together is falling apart. But Robertson can't help himself: he wants to make the sort of difference that drew him to policing in the first place. In Canada, the job is plainer. Less significant. Robertson thrives on doing good, meaningful work.

Lamothe informs Robertson that the dead cop had taken a leave of absence two weeks prior, saying he had urgent family matters to attend to. Lamothe reports that Savin had had a disagreement with his younger brother, Jean-Claude, after which his brother packed up and left their home.

As Jenny heads off for a day at the spa, Robertson takes a taxi to the police station. He speaks with detective John Summerton, explaining the situation with Savin's body and sharing his photograph as well as the one Robertson had found of his younger brother. Robertson explains his suspicion that Savin might have been tracking his brother in secret, knowing that the younger man wanted so badly to go to the States.

The two men go to the refugee holding facility with the photographs in hopes that someone there may know of the boy's whereabouts. The place is dismal. Robertson learns that typically, people are photographed and fingerprinted to ensure they're not wanted by authorities, and then are flown back to Haiti. He shows Jean-Claude's photograph to the refugees, but no one recognizes him. One young man, however, recognizes Robert Savin's picture. The man says Savin defended refugees on the boat against aggression by the smugglers, and confirms that he was thrown overboard. Summerton tells Robertson he will follow up with a man who was identified as the boat's pilot, but that chances are good that Jean-Claude will already have been trafficked into working on the island and thus will be impossible to find.

The next day, Summerton calls Robertson to join him for a visit to a construction site suspected of employing illegal workers. Jenny is angry, because they had planned to rent a car and explore the island for the day. Robertson again chooses work over love, and goes to the construction site, where multiple armed teams are prepared to launch a surprise attack so that the criminals can't make a quick getaway. After the men are rounded up, Robertson looks for Jean-Claude. He doesn't find him, but he does recognize Savin's cousin, Henri. Robertson tells the skinny, bruised young man that he knows Savin, and that Savin is looking for him and Jean-Claude. The boy tells Robertson that Jean-Claude couldn't get on the last boat because it was too full, but that he'll be on the next boat over. Robertson then informs the young man that Savin is actually dead, washed ashore off a prior boat. They ask the boy where he was kept, and who is in charge. The boy mentions a man in a Mercedes Benz, then rattles off the license plate number. If nothing else, it gives Summerton and his team someone to keep an eye on.

When Robertson returns to his hotel, Jenny is gone, and he knows she is upset. She has spent the whole day shopping and has already purchased a piece of art—a gift that Robertson had been hoping to give to her. He apologizes, but later, when Jenny fusses over a cut he





sustained on his arm during a scuffle at the construction site, he knows she is trying to be patient with him. He assures her that he will be able to make their date for the next day. At supper, Robertson outlines the investigation to Jenny, and explains how his presence as a non-native police officer is necessary to solve the crime.

A moment later, Summerton calls: an overloaded refugee boat has been spotted in stormy water. Robertson leaves Jenny at the restaurant. He and Summerton board the police boat at the dock and race toward the refugee boat. Other boats have headed out to help with the rescue mission. As the refugee boat sinks, people leap into the water. Robertson recognizes Jean-Claude Savin standing on the boat deck with a woman and a young girl mere moments before they are flung into the water. Robertson dives in and saves the toddler. He is pulled to the safety of the police dinghy, and Summerton transports the child to the hospital.

Robertson and Summerton return to the holding facility, where Robertson recognizes Jean-Claude. He identifies himself and tells Jean-Claude that his cousin Henri is also on the island, safe. The two police officers work the room, trying to get information from the refugees about who sold them their passage. No one opens up, but Robertson sees that their eyes often dart toward a heavy man in a red shirt. Robertson instructs Summerton to follow up.

Robertson returns to Jean-Claude and informs him that his older brother is dead, and urges the young man to get in touch with Agent Pierre Lamothe upon his return to Haiti. He promises to check up on him when he himself gets back. As he is leaving, Robertson learns that the little girl has been reunited with her mother at the hospital.

He returns to the hotel, where he tells Jenny about the night's events. He is surprised and relieved when she tells him if he didn't care as much about other people's welfare, she wouldn't love him as much as she does.

Questions for Discussion

1. When Ray Robertson discovers the man floating in the water and pulls him to the beach, a crowd gathers (ch. 1). What makes us so curious about death?
2. Ray Robertson says he runs as much for the solitude as for the exercise (ch. 1). Talk about the benefits of exercise, both from a psychological and a physiological perspective.
3. When Robert Savin's dead body turns up on the beach, curious tourists snap photos. For what reason does this frustrate the manager of the nearby hotel?
4. Human trafficking is a serious problem in parts of the world. Do some research, then answer the following questions:
 - a. What is the definition of human trafficking?
 - b. Where are the global hotspots for human trafficking?
 - c. List three reasons for why people are trafficked.
 - d. What percentage of trafficked persons are children (under the age of 18)?
5. Posh resorts frequented by well-to-do tourists line the beaches of many of the world's poorest countries. Yet just a short distance away from the swim-up bars and all-you-can-eat buffets, residents are living lives rife with violence, crime and poverty. Organize a debate around the following:

The establishment of high-end resorts in developing countries amounts to slavery for many citizens of those countries.



RAPID READS



6. Talk about the kinds of stress marriages undergo when one partner is away for long periods. How would this stress be compounded by an assignment or posting that carries with it a degree of danger, e.g. policing or military tours?
7. Ray Robertson prefers not to discuss his police work with his wife, to the extent that on the night following his discovery of Robert Savin's body, Robertson refuses even to say out loud that he found a man's dead body earlier that morning. What might his reasons be for doing so? What do you think of this boundary in their relationship?
8. Robertson describes the holding facility at Providenciales (Provo) as a mild version of hell, with cinder-block buildings on bare, dusty ground surrounded by barbed wire (ch. 6). Explain how places like Provo would be made different if people were committed (in more than just words) to upholding basic human rights and providing for essential dignity. What stops people from creating those supportive conditions? Keep peeling back the layers of this question until you've dug down to a single concept that explains this behavior. Is it defensible?
9. In chapter 7, Robertson informs young Henri Savin that his cousin, Robert, is dead, and that he should give up his hopes of making it to America. Robertson tells the boy that his dream is foolish, that he won't become a rap star, that there are only poor jobs waiting for him in the U.S. As you see it, does Robertson do the right thing in this situation?
10. As their vacation progresses, Robertson feels he might be facing a choice between saving his marriage or continuing to take challenging policing assignments in faraway countries. Talk about how people often shape their own paths to meet other people's expectations.
11. Like plot, setting and characters, *theme* is an important literary element in any novel. Theme is an idea or message about life revealed in a work of literature. It's not really a moral, but it's kind of a guiding message all the same. Discuss the theme of *Blood and Belonging*. Where in the book is the theme most apparent?
12. At several points in the book, Robertson is reminded that Haitians keep trying to flee their country despite the risks—and despite continually being fleeced by traffickers—because hope is a difficult thing to extinguish. In her book *State of Wonder*, author Ann Patchett's protagonist muses: "*Hope is a horrible thing, you know. I don't know who decided to package hope as a virtue because it's not. It's a plague. Hope is like walking around with a fishhook in your mouth and somebody just keeps pulling it and pulling it.*" Discuss.
13. Talk about Jenny Robertson's strength, as demonstrated by the last lines of the book.
14. Imagine, write or sketch a different ending to *Blood and Belonging*.
15. What is the significance of this book's title?

