



READING GUIDE

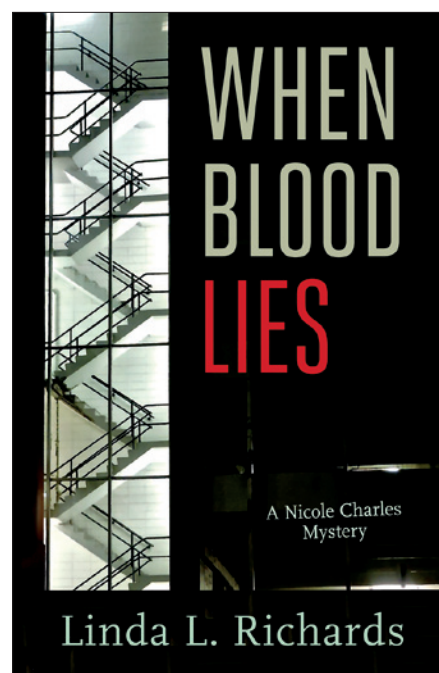
WHEN BLOOD LIES LINDA L. RICHARDS

Reading level: 4.2

Interest level: Adult

Themes: crime fiction, murder, female sleuth,
journalism, newspaper reporter,
urban, auctions, wine

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Summary

Society columnist Nicole Charles is lucky to be one of the few journalists to survive the *Vancouver Post's* downsizing. Even so, she will now be working from home.

At least the paper has given her money for a new desk. Nicole wants to make sure her desk fits in with the retro décor of her apartment. At auction, Nicole ends up bidding against a handsome young man for a teak desk that had been owned by well-known and recently deceased Vancouver architect Morrison Brine. In the middle of the auction, however, the police burst in and hustle the man away, leaving Nicole to win the desk uncontested.

Nicole has trouble paying for the desk with her credit card, but her mother phones her own card number in. Her brother Kyle helps get the incredibly heavy desk home, but both are frustrated when neither of them can get the large drawer unlocked.

That night, Nicole attends two events to write up for the newspaper. One of those is a book launch for wine expert Clark Biederman, one of the *Vancouver Post's* own writers. The book launch is sparsely attended, but Biederman advises Nicole to write a book as a way of becoming an expert in her field.

Later, when Kyle finally does manage to open the desk drawer, the two discover a hidden chamber that conceals *six bottles* of wine. They have been carefully wrapped in paper. While the two are preparing to drink the wine, their parents call to inform them that someone has ransacked their house. The older couple are shaken but not hurt. Nothing appears to be missing from the house, but Nicole is worried.

Knowing she'll need a terrific story to break out of the gossip beat and into what she considers real journalism, Nicole calls police Sergeant Rosa Itani for information about the man who was arrested at the auction. She receives little other than that Joseph MacLeish was arrested on suspicion of criminal activity. On her own, Nicole digs for more information about the desk's owner, looking up Brine: handsome, distinguished, and, judging from online photos, likely Joseph MacLeish's father. She contacts wine expert Clark Biederman, seeking information about the wine bottles. Biederman tells her that the 1929 vintage from Concordia Monastery is considered



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priceless throughout the world. Nicole's desk had six bottles of the stuff. Did someone ransack her parents' place looking for the desk because of the wine?

Through archival research, Nicole learns that as a young man, Brine was assigned a major architectural job: wealthy Enzo Rossi's 10,000-square-foot private residence—an unusually large job for a junior architect. Sergeant Itani calls and informs Nicole that MacLeish has been remanded on suspicion of false stock promotion, and that he is implicated with the mob. Nicole realizes the mafia must also be connected to Brine having been awarded the Rossi residence back in the 1950s.

Nicole arranges an interview with MacLeish in the remand center but he is released before she arrives. Kyle, however, recognizes MacLeish as an old friend and childhood playmate, and suggests they pay a visit to MacLeish's mother. Sari MacLeish remembers Kyle, and through their conversation confirms that Joseph is the illegitimate son of Morrison Brine.

When they finally meet with Joseph MacLeish, Nicole asks him about the desk, and asks why he ordered their parents' place ransacked. But MacLeish knows nothing about a break-in; he simply wanted the desk as a memento of his father, and claims to know nothing about the wine.

Wondering more about the circumstances surrounding Brine's death, Nicole places a call to his eldest son, Jefferson Brine. But Jefferson hangs up when she asks about his father's mob connections.

Nicole goes to the auction house to learn more about the desk. She suspects Brine was killed for the wine that it was hiding, but whoever wanted it hadn't gotten to the desk in time before it was auctioned off. Nicole calls Sergeant Itani to explain her theory, but Itani is skeptical.

When Nicole returns home, she is pushed to the floor by a pair of intruders. Because Nicole raised Itani's suspicion earlier, however, the police show up and take the two men into custody. But the men never took the wine. Instead, they were more interested in the papers in which the bottles had been wrapped. As it turns out, they are share certificates for Enzo Rossi's development company.

Nicole writes up the story, convinced it's going to be her ticket to the top as a reporter. Later, as she is cleaning the desk, she discovers a thick envelope hidden behind the drawer, addressed to Sari MacLeish. It's Brine's admission of his true, deep love for her, and the fact that he regrets not being with her. When she reads it, Sari is devastated: all that time he wasted with a different woman, when he could have spent it living a life of love with Sari.

When the story breaks the next day, it's under the byline of Brent Hartigan, Nicole's rival. Through her fury, Nicole realizes that there will be other opportunities—and that just maybe, she'll take Clark Biederman's advice to write a book.

Questions for Discussion

1. As newspaper readership has declined in recent years, so has the general public's awareness of current events beyond their own corner of the world. People are less informed about international events than ever before, with research showing they focus more closely on what's pertinent only to their own lives and geographic regions. As you see it, what is the danger in this?
2. What female stereotypes does Erica West reflect? What female stereotypes does Nicole Charles show in reflecting on Erica during the downsizing conversation in chapter 1?





3. What would your reaction be if you were downsized in the same way as Nicole, where you were suddenly asked to work from home? In a small group, list the advantages and disadvantages of working from home.
4. Nicole's commitment to doing the best job she possibly can sets her up for future success. She wants everything to be extraordinary, getting her closer to her high water line. What's your high water line?
5. Nicole Charles says her grandmother despaired of her "making anything" of herself (ch. 2). Instead, the older woman would have preferred her granddaughter use her energy in a more "appropriate" way: looking for a husband. As you see it, is marriage as important for women as we make it out to be?
6. Nicole finds herself in the job of society columnist because she was in the right place at the right time. It's a road she didn't plan on taking—but when it opened up, she took it anyway. Talk or write about the times when your career path has changed in similarly unpredictable ways.
7. Reread the section in chapter 5 where Clark Biederman talks to Nicole about Concordia Monastery. What language does the author use to show Nicole's emotional state?
8. Nicole reflects on the grandness of the Rossi estate, where the City of Vancouver now throws functions. As a private residence, Nicole feels the level of opulence to be "stupid" (ch. 6). The Rossi estate was built around 1955. In the intervening years, has consumer culture taken us closer to or farther away from this type of luxury in our private homes?
9. During her conversation with Nicole and Kyle in chapter 7, where she confirms Joseph MacLeish's paternity, Sari MacLeish reflects:

"I guess it doesn't matter now, does it?" In the silence of the room, her voice had startled me slightly. I'd been listening to the echoes of our breathing. "The secrets I've been holding." That shrug again. And a sigh. "Morrie is dead. My son is grown. And it turns out that so many of the things I thought were important were not."

What does she mean when she says so many of the things she thought were important were not?

10. Through his letter to her in chapter 11, Sari MacLeish learns too late that her former employer—and son's father—actually had loved her, and regretted some of the personal choices he had made in his life. What other books or movies does this situation bring to mind?
11. How much do you know about organized crime? As you see it, what does its persistence and pervasiveness say about human nature?
12. Nicole's driving motive at this point in her life is to make it as a "real" reporter. What advice would you give her?
13. In a mystery, a red herring heightens suspense and adds challenge to the mystery by misleading the reader—or the character who is trying to find answers. Go back through *When Blood Lies* and make a list of red herrings.
14. Talk about the meaning and significance of the book's title.
15. What is your opinion of the ending of *When Blood Lies*? What do you think Nicole might do next?

