



**VICKI
DELANY**

**BLOOD
AND
BELONGING**

A RAY ROBERTSON MYSTERY

BLOOD AND BELONGING

VICKI DELANY



RAVEN BOOKS

an imprint of

ORCA BOOK PUBLISHERS

Copyright © 2017 Vicki Delany

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system now known or to be invented, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Delany, Vicki, 1951–, author
Blood and belonging / Vicki Delany.
(Rapid reads)

Issued in print and electronic formats.

ISBN 978-1-4598-1284-0 (paperback).—ISBN 978-1-4598-1285-7 (pdf).—

ISBN 978-1-4598-1286-4 (epub)

I. Title. II. Series: Rapid reads

PS8557.E4239B56 2017 C813'.6 C2016-904576-5
C2016-904577-3

First published in the United States, 2017

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016950245

Summary: In this work of crime fiction, RCMP Sergeant Ray Robertson is on holidays in Turks and Caicos when he discovers the body of a man on the beach. (RL 2.4)



Orca Book Publishers is dedicated to preserving the environment and has printed this book on Forest Stewardship Council® certified paper.

Orca Book Publishers gratefully acknowledges the support for its publishing programs provided by the following agencies: the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund and the Canada Council for the Arts, and the Province of British Columbia through the BC Arts Council and the Book Publishing Tax Credit.

Cover design by Jenn Playford
Cover photography by iStock.com

ORCA BOOK PUBLISHERS
www.orcabook.com

Printed and bound in Canada.

ONE

Waves lapped against pale sand. The breeze was soft and heavy with salt. Water filled the imprint of my shoes and soon erased them. In seconds, no sign that I had been here would remain.

My legs ached, but it was a good ache. My breathing was heavy, but clean air filled my lungs. I slowed to let my heart rate return to normal. Once I could have run forever, but I am not a young man anymore. Age is creeping into my joints whether I want it to or not. These days I run as much for the solitude as the exercise.

I'd left Jenny, my wife, sleeping and crept out of our room without turning on any lights. The promise of a new day had been no more than a gray smudge in the sky to the east. I walked through the quiet hotel grounds. Staff heading for an early shift wiped sleep from their eyes and smothered yawns. Otherwise, only the birds were up. I had the gorgeous beach to myself. I hit the beach and ran for half an hour while the sun rose in a blaze of pink and yellow. Now some other early risers were joining me.

The Caribbean. The Turks and Caicos Islands. Providenciales Island. Grace Bay, which is, according to many, the world's best beach. You'll get no argument from me on that. Miles of white sand, gentle turquoise waves breaking on the shore. Small birds with long legs ran through the surf. Gulls and pelicans swooped low over the water or sat on the gentle swell. Farther out, deep

blue water turned into white breakers as waves broke on the reef.

I did a few stretches, ready to turn around and head back to the hotel. I thought about breakfast. Coffee and fried eggs and a mound of bacon. Piles of toast with butter and strawberry jam. Fresh tropical fruit.

I felt myself grinning. Never mind breakfast. I might be lucky enough to find Jenny still in bed.

As I turned, enjoying that happy thought, something in the water caught my eye. About twenty feet out, large and black, floating on the waves. Much too big to be a bird. A shark maybe? Small, usually harmless nurse sharks came over the reef sometimes. When that happened, the tourists either ran screaming in fear or waded into the water to take pictures.

No, this wasn't a shark.

I squinted as I tried to see better. My eyes aren't quite what they used to be either.

Gradually the shape came into focus. It looked like a person. A man, most likely. He was face down in the water and not moving. He was fully dressed. I glanced up and down the beach. No one else was around. I bent over and untied the laces of my running shoes. I kicked the shoes off, took my phone out of its armband and placed it in one of the shoes.

Then I waded into the warm, salty water. As I got closer I could see that it was a man, all right. Before I reached him, I knew he was dead. No one would be lying in that position, face in the water, not moving, for fun. I braced myself to see something bad. The sea is not kind to bodies, human or otherwise. But I've seen a lot of dead bodies, some of them about as bad as it gets. I could handle this one. I still have a hard time when it's little kids, but even a quick glance showed me this was no kid. He had to be at least the size of me, and I'm a big guy.

He was a black man, dressed in jeans and a gray T-shirt. He wore only one running shoe. The other must have come off in the waves. His hair was cut very short. The back of his neck was wide. His biceps were thick with ropy muscle. He was only a few feet out. I stood beside him, my feet on the sandy bottom, water as high as my chest. Small fish darted around me, flashes of silver in the shallow, sunny water. I took a deep breath and flipped the man over. I let out a sigh of relief. He hadn't been in the water for long. His eyes were a bit of a mess, but everything else looked intact. I grabbed his right arm and pulled him to shore. He bobbed along after me as if this were some sort of macabre game.

A small crowd had gathered while I'd been in the water. Brightly colored shorts and bathing suits. Big hats and white skin turning pink. Some of the women took

one look at my burden and recoiled in horror. Men blanched, and one turned away, hand over his mouth. A small girl with a deep tan and scraped knees said, “Cool.” She darted toward me. Her father grabbed her arm and pulled her away, the child protesting loudly.

We were in front of one of the grandest, most expensive hotels on the island. Staff had begun setting out lounge chairs and red-and-white-striped umbrellas. A skinny brown guy in a T-shirt with the hotel logo ran into the water to help me pull the body onto shore. I picked a man out of the watching crowd. White guy turning bright pink. Big round belly and expensive shoes. Bermuda shorts and a loud Hawaiian shirt. Cell phone attached to his belt. “You,” I said. “Call the police.”

“Do they have 911 here?” he asked.

“Yes.” What can I say? I’m a cop. First thing I do on arriving in a place is learn

how to call for help. The man nodded and pulled out his phone.

The crowd of onlookers was growing steadily. A white woman pushed herself through. She wore an ironed khaki skirt and a crisp red-and-white button-down shirt. Her dark hair fell in a sleek bob to her chin. I didn't need to read her name tag to know she was a hotel manager. She glanced at the body and swallowed. She raised her head and looked into my face. "Do you, uh, know this man?" she asked me.

"Never seen him before. I was out for a jog and spotted him in the water."

"Are you a guest here?"

"Nope. Just passing by." The hotels put their chairs and umbrellas on the sand, but all the beaches in Turks and Caicos are public. I gestured to the body. "Do you recognize him?"

She avoided looking at him again. "No. He's not an employee here."

“A guest maybe?” I said.

The manager was about to say no. Instead, she quickly said, “I don’t recognize him.”

The dead man was highly unlikely to be a guest. He was black, for one thing, and most of the tourists were white, although some African Americans did come. Anyone was welcome here. If they had enough money. His clothes were ordinary and not very expensive. That didn’t mean much. These days some rich people dressed like street bums, although with better shoes and jewelry.

“We’ve called 911,” I said.

“That’s good.” She turned to the onlookers. “Don’t worry, everyone. Help is coming. A most unfortunate incident.” She waded into the crowd, offering sympathy while trying to get people to leave. A couple of hotel security guards arrived at a rapid trot. They then stood around, not doing much of anything.

I dropped to my knees beside the body. For the first time, I looked fully into the man's face. He was young, probably in his midtwenties. His skin was dark but not a true black. I ran my eyes down his body. His clothes were pretty much undisturbed. That meant he hadn't washed over the razor-sharp rocks and coral of the reef. His T-shirt was wrapped around his neck, pushed up by force of the waves. His stomach was flat, his chest hard with muscle.

The center of his belly had a small but deep tear. Around it were the marks of little teeth. The fish would have gone for the wound immediately. They liked to nibble on the easier-to-get bits first. The man's stomach might have had been sliced open on a sharp rock or torn apart by a larger fish.

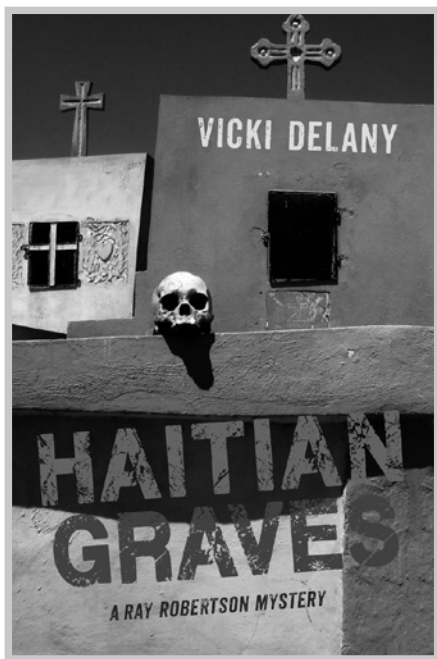
Or not.

I knew better than to disturb a crime scene, but I figured the sea had already

done that. Most of the crowd had wandered away. A few people were still watching me, but no one ventured too close. The chewed-up eye sockets were enough to keep them back. I unwrapped the T-shirt from around his neck and lowered it over his chest. Not for modesty, but to check something out. A tear in the shirt matched the location of the stomach wound. No, not a tear, but a cut. I leaned over and looked closer. I ran my fingers across the fabric. I studied the edges. The cut was clean and sharp.

This man had been knifed.

*Don't miss book two in the
Ray Robertson series:*



VICKI DELANY is one of Canada's most prolific and varied crime writers. The first book in her Sergeant Ray Robertson series for Rapid Reads, *Juba Good*, was nominated for a Derringer Award, an Arthur Ellis Award, and the Ontario Library Association's Golden Oak Award. She is the author of more than twenty published crime novels, including standalone Gothic thrillers, the Constable Molly Smith series, the Klondike Gold Rush Mysteries, and the Year Round Christmas Mysteries. Under the pen name of Eva Gates she is the national bestselling author of the Lighthouse Library cozy series.

Vicki lives in Prince Edward County, Ontario. She is the past president of the Crime Writers of Canada. Please visit Vicki at www.vickidelany.com. Vicki has written three books for the Rapid Reads series. The first, *A Winter Kill*, features rookie constable Nicole Patterson. The second, *Juba Good*, and the third, *Haitian Graves* are the first two books in the Ray Robertson mystery series.