

Blood Will Tell

Jean Lorra

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Are vampires evil? Or are they pitiable, if scary, creatures of instinct and an unknown order of reality? Ever since 1897, when Bram Stoker's *Dracula* turned folk legend into melodrama, horror writers have offered many different answers to such questions, and this book still manages to offer some surprises. Part police procedural, part paranormal romance, and part small town slice-of-life, this vampire tale is full of twists that keep the suspense roiling till the very end. The book lulls skeptical readers with an opening scene of utter normality. What could be more reassuring than a Mayberry-style police station in a small Kentucky city, where detective Brandy Mather is finishing up her week's reports? Even when she's called to the local campus to investigate a body, it appears that an elderly man just died of old age-although there are a few inconsistencies.

Looking into these, Brandy's personal life gets jolted out of the doldrums. An interview with a Computer Science professor with a nearby office leads to a nice romance, comfortable for a while but becoming problematical as discrepancies surface about Dan Martin's past. Brandy's overprotective mother suddenly remarries and moves to Florida. When her best friend is found murdered with bite marks and a slit throat, Brandy begins to believe in the impossible.

Meanwhile, other unlikely crimes pile up. High school cheerleaders turn tricks for cocaine, a baffling quadruple murder follows a bank holdup, and the town's beloved old coroner tries to break into the judge's chambers. All these threads converge in a roaring (literally) climactic scene at the mansion shown on the book's cover.

Lorra has written science fiction, including several *Star Trek* novels, and her command of action scenes and weird events, honed in that genre, works well in this story. A Professor of English at Murray State University, she knows Western Kentucky mores and makes the setting both realistic and intriguing. Even characters who are "types" are more than stereotypes: the scene of the aristocratic politician playing Good Old Boy as he gladhands everyone in the restaurant is unforgettable.

The novel's biggest faults are the high decibel ending, which may strike some readers as interminable, and a curious first paragraph about how Brandy could be a twenty-eight-year-old virgin. In between, *Blood Will Tell* serves up an unusual blend of mystery, local color, human love, and a few delicious chills.

EMILY ALWARD (May / June 2003)

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