

Vampire Blood

By Kathryn Meyer Griffith

*Prequel to **Human No Longer***

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For my beloved husband, Russell, who is sometimes my plot consultant and for Terry and Ann (the theater owners) who first presented me with the seed that grew into this book. Terry, we miss you!

Chapter One

July 20

Excerpt from a newspaper article on the front page of the *Evansville Globe-Democrat*:

Mysterious Cult-like Murders Continue to Baffle Authorities as Terror Reigns in Evansville and the Surrounding Areas

Another mutilated victim, a male identified as a car salesman from nearby Breton, was found early this morning on the outskirts of Evansville in a heavily wooded area near Ivers Creek. The victim, Dennis Shavers of Calcutta Drive, was found at approximately 7:10 A.M., nude with slashes across his chest and throat. The city coroner so far has not officially released the actual cause of death, but there is speculation about the unusual amount of blood loss—the same as the previous five victims.

A growing sense of panic has gripped the town and a nightly curfew of 8:00 P.M. has been instigated.

When questioned, the Evansville Police Department had no comment on the sudden rash of vicious murders other than to say that the investigation is going well, and that they expect to make arrests in the near future.

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In the dead of a sultry summer's night the man slammed the truck door, and the sound reverberated painfully over the neighborhood like the closing of a coffin's lid. There was no moon, just the strange clinging white mist that laced the dark streets, making it perfect for their escape.

They were running again, and he was sick to death of it.

His vacant eyes stared back at the brick house that he'd labored on to make comfortable for all of them. The house with the windowless cellar.

He could easily make out every detail of the structure. Even in pitch blackness, his keen eyes were sharper than a human's in broad daylight.

He regretted having to leave the house just when he'd decided to open that night restaurant in the upper floors. He'd begun to make plans. It could have meant living a normal life for a while. It could have meant some release from the boredom.

It could have.

With a resigned sigh, he turned and walked towards the waiting truck and the figure silhouetted in the gloom next to it. A girl. Her long hair was pale in the murkiness.

"Get your ass in the truck, Irene. I won't tell you again," he lashed out, fighting visibly to retain control of his anger. She didn't move.

"Running like scared rabbits again, are we?" she baited him in a calm voice.

"No. We're just getting out of here before the police come and drag you—all of us—away in chains. I'm not taking any chances this time," the man growled at the girl, who still faced him defiantly on the edge of the street.

His hold on her was tenuous at best. She was stronger than he, only she didn't know that yet; so she played his game. Obeyed him—for now. He didn't want to think about the day she would discover that, in truth, he couldn't really control her at all.

She laughed contemptuously. "I'd like to see them try. Humans are so puny. I'd rip all their throats out."

"I'm telling you for the last time," he gestured at the truck door, sighing again in exasperation. "We don't have all night, remember?"

"What if I don't want to go?" she announced in a cold voice.

"We'll go without you," he stated flatly. He could see by the jerk of her head that that had touched her. Loneliness for them was real.

"After all, you're to blame for this."

“Is it my fault the old married guy had the hots for me?” Again, her laugh wasn’t quite human. “I only gave him what he desired, and then I took what I desired.”

“He was rather old for you, wasn’t he?” Sarcasm dripped through the man’s deep husky voice.

“Was he?” There was sardonic humor in hers.

“He had a wife and three kids, a pillar of the goddamn community for pity’s sake.” The man had sworn he would not get angry, but his reserve was slipping away. How many times had they gone over this? Endlessly.

“I thought we’d agreed to kill only animals—cattle, horses—or, if the urge gets too damn strong, drain a little blood from transients, throwaways or old people...not a lot, just enough to satisfy you, because losing a little blood never hurts them. Remember? You *promised* not to *kill*. Since that fiasco last winter in Haleston?”

“You mean, *you* had agreed. I never had. No one tells me what to do. No one ever has. I’m not afraid of *them* are you?”

There was a threat hidden in her childish, silken voice that was not lost on the man. Still he didn’t back down. He couldn’t afford to. Showing weakness to her would be foolish.

“Damn it, Irene! Did you have to kill so many, so close to home?” the man exploded finally in a scornful whisper; grabbing her firmly by the arm, he shoved her towards the open truck door and pushed her in. She let him.

He leaned over her. “Last night, did you have to compound the problem by killing such a vital one; one that would be as missed as this one has been?” he snarled into her face. “And kill him so heinously!” Suspecting what she’d been up to the night before, he had followed her and found her over the body, but he’d been too late to save the poor bastard. “Did you have to maul him, tear his throat to ribbons and leave him naked out there in the open? You drank every last drop of his blood.”

The girl smiled, her lips a smug arc. She didn’t care how vicious her kills were, she never did.

“Do you want them to catch you?”

She didn’t answer.

“The newspapers love that kind of gore. They eat it up,” he breathed. “They’ll be looking for his murderer now with a vengeance, and they won’t quit until they find out who killed him and why, especially since the victim’s brother turns out to be a police officer. We have no choice but to run.” There was disgust in the man’s voice.

“So what?” She turned her head away, and skittered her fingers lightly over the vehicle’s upholstery.

He got into the driver’s seat, beside an older woman with flowing silvery hair who’d remained silent throughout the whole conversation; her eyes were closed in the darkness, her body tense.

She finally spoke. “Can you two just quit it for now?” She smiled wanly and waved her hand. “The harm’s done. Let’s just leave it behind us, okay? We’ve got to get moving.”

She was right, and they all knew it.

The girl grunted in the back seat. The man said nothing.

The older woman turned to him and flashed her very long, sharp teeth. Two fangs peeked out from her bloodless lips. Then she reached out and clasped his right hand. Her touch seemed to calm him.

“Do you know where we’re going now, Terrence?”

“I think,” the man replied softly, rubbing the side of his face. “It’s time to reclaim an old inheritance.”

Then louder, “It’s a long drive. A small town on the coast of Florida called Summer Haven. There’s something waiting there for us.”

“Ah, so we’re finally going back?” the woman said thoughtfully, her tone showing that she knew exactly what he was referring to.

“Yes. It’s been long enough. They’ve forgotten by now.”

“I hope so,” the woman whispered.

“We could fly, you know?” The young girl’s voice from the rear seat was disdainful.

“Yes, and are you going to fly the trailer on your back there as well? We need it, or would you prefer to find a wormy, old cemetery somewhere, as in the old days? Perhaps you’d want to sleep over in a filthy mausoleum on the way, or in someone else’s slightly used coffin?”

The girl shivered behind him, but merely shrugged her shoulders. “It doesn’t really matter, I suppose. Just as long as we go someplace warmer this time. I’m sick of snow and cold. You have to wear too many clothes.” Then she muttered something else under her breath that he couldn’t hear, as acute as his hearing was. More complaints, probably. She was spoiled.

The man ignored her grumbling and started the truck, checking to make sure the Silver Stream, where the others were, was following solidly behind them as it should. The others hadn’t wanted to listen to his and Irene’s bickering. He didn’t blame them.

They were afraid of her tantrums. They were afraid of her.

Ever since Irene had joined them, she’d been nothing but trouble, but they’d quickly found that they needed her, maybe even more than she needed them, and they knew it. She was powerful, amusing when she wanted to be. Gifted. Crafty. She had brought new blood and excitement to their mix, just when they’d truly needed it.

The young blond girl scowled out the window into the night as the truck and trailer picked up speed, her pretty face petulant and sly. “You’re just no fun anymore,” she hissed. “Rules, rules, rules, ever since we started this charade. Why don’t we—”

“I’ve told you a million times,” the man cut her off with such steel in his voice that the girl immediately shut up, “there’s safety in numbers, in normalcy, or you, my little flirtatious bloodsucker, would have been caught long ago. Have you learned so little in all your years? Don’t forget how we met.”

Boston. Yes, that had been a close one, too. They’d found her lair, and had planned to burn it with her trapped inside during the daylight hours...but he, Michelson, had found her first and warned her; perhaps, he’d even saved her. Perhaps. Who knew? She’d confessed she’d gotten out of worse predicaments, but she owed him something, didn’t she?

So she had joined his family.

“How could I forget? You never let me, do you, Father dear?”

There was a new touch of belligerence in her voice and something more, something ancient and far deadlier.

He frowned as a car’s headlights slashed across his face.

He almost ended up in a ditch, trailer and all. He still cringed before bright light. Old habits died hard. A second later, as the sound of vengeful laughter pricked him, he muttered an obscenity under his breath. He got the shiny red truck back on the highway, turning off a short while later onto a deserted smaller road to avoid further headlights.

They drove through the night, not stopping to feed along the way. They’d park at dawn in a lush part of the woods, he decided, where the sun was dim, and rest during the day in the trailer with the black shades pulled down over the windows.

In a few nights, when they were far enough away to risk it, they’d seek food. When it was safer.

The others wouldn’t like it, but he was determined not to leave behind a trail of bread crumbs this time.

They’d just have to damn well wait, he told himself, as the vehicle and its shadow flew down the misty highways towards the new town, far away from the bloody mess they’d left behind and the bloodhound police.

Far away. Someplace inconspicuous, out-of-the-way, and warm. Fresh territory. Maybe they would start that business he’d been dreaming of. He wasn’t sure of the condition of what awaited them there, but he was hopeful that it was good, and that everything would work out.

This time, he fretted they would just have to be more careful. He’d have to watch Irene closer; that was all.

What he needed to do was put her on a leash.

There’d been too damn many close calls lately.

They weren't as stupid as they used to be in the old days, and why was he the only one to see it? Never the others. Well, he'd have to make them understand somehow. He had to.

Someday their very survival, he was sure, would depend on it.