

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS

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**Blood**  
**Alan Durant**

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Also by Alan Durant

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## About the Book

SLAUGHTER IN THE SUBURBS! Thieves Murder Couple in Cold Blood!

It was the sort of tabloid heading you could read almost any day. But these were Robert Harrison's parents - shot dead in their suburban home.

Robert's initial shock is soon replaced by intense anger as he becomes convinced that there is an adult conspiracy to 'protect' him from the truth. Frustrated by a host of unanswered questions and dissatisfied with the efforts of the police, Robert decides to carry out his own investigation and in doing so, he uncovers disturbing new details about his parents' lives - details which not only put his life in danger, but push his very sanity to the brink.

For Ma and Dad  
with love and thanks

# **BLOOD**

Alan Durant

DEFINITIONS

in association with The Bodley Head

The thing that really drove me crazy was that they wouldn't even let me see my own parents. When I came to the house - my house, me and my family's house - they wouldn't let me in. They said they couldn't let anybody in, because of disturbing the evidence and all that. But that was just a lot of crap. They didn't want me to see. I suppose they thought they were being very noble and protecting my poor juvenile feelings, but in fact they were messing up my feelings totally for ever. It wasn't all their fault, I suppose - they were just being adults. I don't ever want to be an adult.

Mr Lees, the headmaster, told me the news. I was in the middle of a homework detention with Vanissart, the Old Fart, when Mrs Bell, the school secretary, came in, looking embarrassed like she always did. She handed the Old Fart a note and he read it. Then he looked up with this serious expression on his face. The expression he had when he was about to deliver one of his pompous lectures. But this time he didn't give any lecture. He just looked at me and said, 'Harrison, you're to go to the headmaster's office. Now.' And so I did, thinking, What the hell have I done? What could I have done? I was thinking about whether I'd been late too many times the previous term, if someone had noticed I'd done a bunk one afternoon earlier in the week, if I was going to get a lecture about my GCSE results . . .

But it wasn't anything like that. I hadn't done anything. It had been done to me. Parenticide or whatever they call it. Only Lees didn't say that, of course. I don't even remember exactly what it was he said. He didn't say, 'Oh, Harrison, I'm sorry but your parents have just both been shot to death.' He didn't say, 'Sorry, Harrison, but you're now officially an orphan.' He didn't say, 'I'm afraid someone's just totally destroyed your life.' But he might just as well have done. Because that, basically, is what had happened.

There were police cars all over the place. Radios blurring out incomprehensible messages, lights flashing. The works. It was very weird, because the only time there were ever that many cars around the house, and all that noise, was when my parents were having one of their parties, and for a moment that was the thought that came into my head. But this was no party . . . It was murder – and my parents were the victims. And I wasn't even allowed to see them, to hold them, to say . . . I don't know what I wanted to say. I just wanted to see them, because I suppose I didn't really believe that they could be dead. It seemed that if I actually saw them and touched them, could just be in the same room as them, then I'd see they were alive really. This was all an elaborate game of murder in the dark. See, here were the detectives . . . Turn on the lights, open the door. Let me in! Let me in! Let me in, you bastards! Let me in!

But they didn't, and I never saw my parents again – not even to identify the bodies, because my uncle did that. Someone responsible and capable and grown-up. An adult. I don't like adults. That's why I'm here, in this place. Though, God knows, there's enough of the bastards here.

They never tell me the truth. I guess they're just incapable of it. Teachers, doctors, police, your own family even . . . I wasn't allowed into my own house, I wasn't allowed to see my own parents, but what do I see next day in the raggiest rag of the gutter press but a photograph of the whole bloody scene. The photograph was so badly printed that I didn't even realize what it was at first. What drew my attention to the photograph initially was this picture on the wall – it's a framed print of a painting entitled *La Lezione di Geografia* by a Venetian painter called Pietro Longhi – because I knew we had that picture up in our sitting room. It was my dad's favourite painting – he always used to say it was a very civilized picture, 'the encapsulation of a golden age'. There's a woman sitting down at a small table with a globe and a man standing with one hand in his jacket like Nelson, and



the other hand holding one of those eyeglass things they used to have. He's peering through it at the globe - or the woman maybe. At the front on the left is a stout man dressed in brown, holding an atlas, and there's another atlas open at his feet. Above him there are shelves of huge books and a velvet drape. In the background another woman - a maid perhaps - is bringing a tray of coffee or tea. It looks like they're planning a great voyage. It's a wonderful painting. I've never seen it up anywhere else except on our wall. And I was on the verge of thinking, How strange that someone else should have that same painting, when of course I realized it was our sitting room and those were my father's old leather-bound volumes of Sir Walter Scott that were strewn about the floor and his whisky decanter that had smashed and stained the cream carpet and my mother's brains that had caused that thick, dark smear up the wall . . .

You couldn't have seen the faces very well even if there had been much to see. They were just figures slumped on the floor. Although, if you looked really closely, you could just about make out that the top half of my mother's skull was no longer there. But at least my father's face was turned away from the camera. He'd only been shot once - but the bullet had hit his heart. The doctor said they'd both died instantaneously, but then he knew that's what I wanted to hear, didn't he?

The headline read, *SLAUGHTER IN SUBURBS!* Then underneath it said: *Thieves Murder Couple in Cold Blood.* Then there was another line underneath: *'Catch these animals!' brother pleads.* That's my mother's brother, Uncle Jim. What he actually said - not that it really matters - was that he wouldn't be able to sleep easy at nights until the killers were brought to justice. But that sort of talk doesn't sell newspapers. Murder, rape, assault, mutilation, child abuse, torture, threats - violence in all its vile shapes and sizes - that's what sells newspapers, isn't it? Well, there was

plenty of evidence of it in that wrecked and bloody room, from whose blood-spattered walls an elegant Venetian peered through his eyeglass at the carnage beneath him as if to say, 'What on earth has become of this great wonderful civilized world of ours?'

I was travelling on a bus at the time. God knows why. I was still in a state of shock and certainly not fit to be out in public. But I was staying at my uncle's and suddenly I needed some air. I had to get out. When I saw the photograph and the headlines, well, then I flipped. I snatched the paper from the guy sitting in front of me and I started to rip it apart - tear it into shreds. He started shouting and then I just went hysterical . . . I don't remember much after that. Apparently - so Aunty Susan says - some young guy and his girlfriend helped get me home. For some days after that I was in a pretty bad state and didn't see anyone and then it was the funeral.

And I don't want to talk about that.

Old Sigmund's just finished reading what I wrote in the notebook about Mum and Dad's death, and he gave me another one of his bloody lectures - sorry, very reasonable arguments. (I suppose I should introduce Sigmund - for posterity's sake. His real name is Dr Ackfield. He's a shrink in this place they sent me to. I call him Sigmund because I want to annoy him.)

Anyway, what Sigmund said is that I should go back to the beginning of this whole sordid business and relive what was happening to me at the time. He wants me to put down in his poxy notebook what I felt then, not in retrospect - i.e. he wants me to cut out all the rude bits about doctors and police and adults in general. I said, 'What you mean is, you want me to be selective with the truth.' And he said no, he wanted the whole truth - had to have it, in order to help me - but he wanted the pure truth, not my subsequent interpretation of it. And I said, 'How can I just forget what I've learned?' And he said that he agreed I couldn't, not entirely, but he thought I should try. Not *must* try, you notice - he's far too reasonable for that. But *should* try. Well, sod him, because if he thinks I'm going to write down all that stuff about the funeral just so that he can get a kick out of my grief, he can think again. If there's something I don't want to talk about, then I won't. That's my right, and I think I've bloody well earned it after all I've been through . . .

I'd just started my first term in the sixth form when it happened. But I didn't go back. For a few weeks I didn't really do anything at all. Those weeks seemed to last for ever, as though time had just stopped - like a tide that had gone out for good and left me washed up and stranded. I lay upstairs in my adopted bedroom most of the time, where no one could see me. Where I could be alone with my misery and my memories, spaced out on sedatives. Doctors, psychiatric nurses, counsellors of one sort or another came and went and made various therapeutic suggestions - but I didn't take anything in. Just about the only thing I could communicate with was the bare, painted walls and ceiling of my room. I'd stare at the cracks in the ceiling for hours on end, tracing their jagged lines back and forth, back and forth, thinking about nothing in particular. It was like I was there but didn't really exist.

I hardly spoke to Uncle Jim or Aunty Susan at all. Yet, for as long as I could remember, Uncle Jim had been like a second father to me. Sometimes he even seemed more like my father than my real father, Dad was away so much. Dad was export sales director for a multinational aluminium company. He was always flying off around the world somewhere or other to sell his company's products - foil mainly. Whenever he introduced Dad to anyone, Uncle Jim always used to say: 'This is David. He's in foil.' It never failed to make someone laugh. It always made me laugh - not so much at the joke, but at the way people responded. I remember one summer at a family party, Uncle Jim introducing Dad to a very old and distant relative of Aunty Susan's who'd just come back from Singapore or somewhere. Uncle Jim said his usual line. The old woman leant forward, took hold of Dad's arm and said very seriously: 'You poor man, you must be baking.' I laughed a lot at that. Everyone did.

It was Uncle Jim who taught me how to ride a bike; Uncle Jim who took me to my first football match and explained the rules; Uncle Jim who showed me how to fire an air pistol . . . But not even he could teach me how to live without my parents. I couldn't talk to him, and he couldn't get through to me - no matter how hard he tried. A real tension developed between us.

'You've got to start thinking of the future, Robert,' he said one dinner time, when the three of us sat glumly round the kitchen table, like strangers in a station buffet. I knew what he was driving at because he'd mentioned it long before all this terrible stuff had happened; he wanted me to go into his company. Uncle Jim was a pretty big fish in our small pond - he had a thriving central heating and boiler business, as well as being a prominent local councillor with aspirations towards one day being mayor. I couldn't see what possible use I could be to him.

'You can't just sit in that room moping for ever,' he said.

'Why not?' I replied. 'Why shouldn't I just sit there? What's the point of doing anything?'

'You've got a life to live,' he said. 'You owe it to your parents. You owe it to yourself.'

'My parents are dead,' I said, bitterly. 'I don't owe anyone anything. Just leave me alone.'

And that was the end of another depressing meal. I stormed out and went back up to my room - or 'tomb' as Uncle Jim had once, in a moment of frustration, referred to it.

It went on like that for weeks. And then one day I decided that I just had to get out. I felt like I was being suffocated in that house, under the weight of Uncle Jim and Aunty Susan's concern, and I knew that they must be finding living with me pretty unbearable. I decided it was time I went home - just for a few days. I thought it might help to lessen the sense of rootlessness that I was feeling. It *was* my home after all,

despite what had happened. All my stuff was there - my clothes, my books, my music . . .

I knew Uncle Jim and Aunty Susan would object if I told them face to face what I wanted to do - and I didn't want to get into a row. So I wrote them a note, explaining how I was feeling and that it would only be for a day or so and that they didn't have to worry about me doing anything stupid. (I think they knew that anyway - I'd gone through the suicidal stage.) I waited until they'd both gone out, packed my bags, left the note, and went back home.

The first thing that struck me when I got off the bus was the smell. It was that distinctive, pungent, smoky, sort of melancholy smell that is the hallmark of autumn in the suburbs. Sundays in particular. It immediately evoked pictures of Sunday morning walks, collecting conkers, my father burning leaves in the garden, arriving home from school to a warm house and my mother's smiling face . . . Cosy family scenes that would now only live in photograph albums and my memory. My poor bloodstained memory.

My parents' house was at the end of a cul-de-sac, some distance from the other houses in the road and further cut off by a tall hedge and a long driveway. Two months had passed since I'd last been here. Then it had been late summer and the place had been teeming with police cars and activity. Now it was as quiet as . . . well, as quiet as the grave. Everything was brown and barren-looking. Walking through the gateway was like walking into a cemetery. The garden was buried under fallen leaves. The house looked like it had been empty for years rather than just a couple of months. I shivered. It was weird, disquieting, how quickly the familiar had become strange. I felt as though the I who was now walking up the drive was not the same I who had lived here for over seventeen years. I felt like a stranger, an intruder. I felt uncomfortable being alive.

That first night back was the worst. I walked around the house, pacing from room to room, but not daring to go into *the* room – the room where it had all happened. I was scared, horrified about what I might see. What if they hadn't cleared up all the mess? What if blood still stained the walls and carpet? What if – it was crazy, but I couldn't get it out of my mind – my parents' bloody, dehumanized corpses were still there? But, behind it all, what was really terrible, I suppose, was the knowledge that they wouldn't be there. Not now. Not ever.

I knew I'd have to go into the sitting room eventually, though. I couldn't avoid it for ever. After all, it was the last place Mum and Dad had been alive. But it was hard going through the door. It made me shake violently for a moment . . . I looked around. The room had been meticulously tidied. Put back to normal, I suppose 'they' would have said – that is, whoever had done the tidying. Only it was actually much too clinically tidy to be normal. Mum was always very particular about keeping the place clean and orderly, but her tidiness wasn't like most people's – it was sort of haphazard. A kind of ordered chaos rather than neatness. Dad was quite different; he tended to put things anywhere. It was one of the things that drove Mum crazy. Now everything (everything that was left, that is) was sort of in its rightful place, but arranged in a completely foreign way.

There was a faint smudge (which I thought might have been blood) on the paintwork by the door, just where my mother had been shot, but apart from that you'd never have known that this room had recently been the scene of a brutal, bloody murder. Someone had even carefully cleaned up Dad's leather-bound volumes of Sir Walter Scott and put them back on the bookshelves in order. They stood alongside the many other old, impressive, but mainly unread tomes that Dad had collected over the years. Dad was a great collector, but not a great reader. It was the