



## **A Love Like Blood**

*Victor Yates*

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Half Somali and Cuban, 17-year old Carsten Tynes, deals with the intricacies of race, Americanism, syncretism, migration, and sexuality under his dying father's abusive hand in A Love Like Blood. Set in 1998, his family relocates to Beverly Hills, MI to expand their photography business. His father has lung disease and promises to give him the business if he marries his ex-girlfriend. Faced with an unwanted marriage and the slow death of his father, Carsten retreats behind his camera. His camera becomes the loose thread that slowly unravels his relationship with his father and reveals the unseen world of "men who move at night." However, it is his infatuation with his neighbor, Brett that severs the symbolic umbilical cord between his father and him. When death pushes his father and Brett together, he makes a dangerous decision to protect them.

## **A Love Like Blood Details**

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Author : Victor Yates

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# **From Reader Review A Love Like Blood for online ebook**

## **Christina's Bookshelf says**

4.5\*

A Love Like Blood is an exceptional story. It really is one of a kind. Victor's writing style is so unique. When I was through with this story I was elated with Carsten, the main character. I was so proud, honored, relieved, saddened, and so much more. This story isn't a "finding love" romance. To me this story is about Carsten and his liberation.

You can see my full review on my YouTube Channel: <https://youtu.be/kS3IWHT6W0g>

\*\*\*Trigger warning: physical, mental, and emotional abuse.\*\*\*

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## **Jordyn says**

An enchanting and heartwrenching coming of age story. Surprisingly enough, I was going in expecting it to be a lot more of a rebellious suburban teen romance. Which it is in certain aspects, however, it is really a rebellious romance of the self. Carsten falling deeply in love with the "shameful" part of himself.

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## **A.M. Leibowitz says**

This is by far one of the best books I've read this year. The writing is phenomenal, really tight. Everything is woven together perfectly. Each scene is carefully detailed, reflecting the theme of photography, as though we are seeing the story like a photo album. In this case, although there is an ongoing plot, it's the individual parts which are most important. There is a running metaphor of blood throughout which comes up frequently and in different ways, big and small. The pieces all fall together exactly right in the stark ending.

I can't say enough good things about this book. This is not your typical contemporary gay fiction. It's highly literary, and for that reason it should appeal to a much wider audience. In my opinion, this is an absolute must-read. Although Carsten's sexuality is important to the story, and even though that is what it is generally about, this is much more to do with family and expectations and who Carsten is becoming. Readers might not share Carsten's specific cultural heritage or sexual orientation, but how he navigates both of these and the choices he makes as a result of his upbringing are things most readers can relate to.

The visuals are absolutely stunning. It is not so much that the scenes are described in accurate detail but that they are given life through Carsten's eyes. We're seeing what he wants us to, what his camera has captured and the way he wants to present it to us. I loved how even he is surprised by what he discovers at the end, as though the picture he thought he had is now revealed to be something else.

Carsten's vicious father is thoroughly unlikable, however, he isn't necessarily the villain despite his ongoing

abuse of his sons. We catch glimpses of how Carsten's friend Brett views the situation as an outsider, and it's tempting to agree with him. Carsten won't allow it, however, revealing the details as though he's developing the film for us. Readers should be forewarned that there are scenes of violence; I found them to be more intense than graphic, but because of the sensitive nature of family abuse cycles, some readers may find it more difficult to read those parts.

Ultimately, this is far more about family, about where we come from and where we are going, than anything else. It's rich and detailed and absolutely gorgeous. I cannot wait to read more from Victor Yates, especially if this is the quality of writing we can expect.

Review also at: <https://divinemagazine.net/a-love-lik...>

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## Tex Reader says

### 4.0 of 5 stars - "Get to know me before you reject me".

*[Thanks to the author and Goodreads' MMRG Don't Buy My Love program for a free copy in exchange for an honest review]*

This was one of the best debuts I have read, and Victor Yates' Lammy for best debut was well deserved. It was brave, unique and artistic in a story that challenged, at times confused, and ultimately moved me.

There are a number of things I applaud. I commend its diversity, in terms of cultural and racial as well as sexual. I especially enjoyed learning about Somali life and customs. I liked the setting - the late 90's, and while I'm not familiar with Detroit, I am with the Chicago seen in the flashbacks. And I appreciated that this went beyond an m/m romance, including it but also telling a broader story that was more compelling, complicated, emotionally layered, and at times dark and disturbing.

The latter came mostly from the subject matter, and Yates skillfully interwove that with the character development. He bravely tackled childhood parental physical abuse, homophobia and hate crimes, which made it uncomfortable to read at times. I found it was psychologically true in how he developed the characters, how both abusers and victims think and behave, from their anger and guilt to flattening their feelings and even continuing the violence. While I saw a few hiccups along the way (like the ending), it made for some poignant scenes, like the one in the market, where a Somali proverb appeared on a sign, then after an outburst it was turned against the proud Somali, yet homophobic, father: "*Get to know me before you reject me.*"

To present all this, Yates had an interesting poetic style - observant, descriptive, and unique - which made it a tough read, but rewarding. Frankly, I often struggle reading poetry because I tend to need things spelled out for me, instead of having a picture painted or underlying meaning alluded to by symbolism and similes. But once I do see it, it is that much more pleasing. That was true here, too. While it still made for some confusing moments, I marveled at Yates' eye and gift of the word, especially in framing difficult subjects. And then later in the story I read this saying that made sense of it: "*The brave interested in speaking Somali also have to understand poetry. Allusion, proverbs, and rhyme pepper the language,*" as it did in this story.

Here's an example, of a passage I found insightful:

*"Given distance, I realize telling the truth is like taking a picture. Through the lens, the photographer has to find meaning, something necessary to share. Being behind a camera, helped me avoid telling my father I wanted to be with a man. It became easier dealing with*

*what was in my camera lens, than what was in front of me in life. I was afraid. Fear was just as much a part of me as a scar. The shame I covered the scar with was a cocoon, and I became my fear...I don't know how to define being a man. However, I do know I want to be a man who isn't afraid to share who he is. There are all kinds of fear. Having to cross out an entire part of your life with a grease pencil, may be the worst kind."*

While maybe not for everyone, this and many more moments like this impressed me about this promising gifted author.

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## Nocturnalux says

### **I received a free copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.**

There are books that due to a combination of factor transcend their genre. **A Love Like Blood** is one such book. Through its deep artistry, unflinching honesty and relevance, it goes quite beyond what one usually finds in M/M romance. It is both an exercise in aesthetics and an important read for anyone interested in gay issues. The fact that it strays from the still all too prevalent Caucasian norm but tackles a much less represented demographic, American Somali/Cuba in this case, gives it an edge that is all the more intense given the mastery of cultural nuance on which the novel is grounded. The grammar of cultural differences and how it spans across language(s), modes of thought, social pressure, patterns the novel and permeates it deeply. The text is structured in such a way as to convey all this from the inside, so to speak, so that it offers 'diversity' not as a mere buzz word but a very personal experience. As the title entails this is a violent book, a loving book, the two being hopelessly interwoven.

From the very start it is clear that **A Love** is ambitious in scope and style. The first person narrative told in the present tense has a level of immediacy that borders on stream of consciousness does not always make for an easy read. While it never becomes non-linear it does on occasion blur some lines, with episodes only gaining their true contours halfway through their description. This approach to structure is very interesting as it uses literature as photography: the text develops its scenes gradually as a photograph being revealed in a darkroom.

Photography is crucial to this coming-of-age tale of a teenage boy of Somali descent who from a very early age worked side by side with his highly volatile father. The family business is taking photographs and it becomes Carsten's medium of seeing the world, almost literally, and the only way of connecting to said father. It is one of **A Love's** greatest achievements that it manages to convey so much texture, scent, sound, in what is essentially such a visual means of expression.

The novel is unflinching in exploring how homophobia destroys family ties. Carsten's father, Reed, is part of a long chain of Somali fathers who liberally pummel their sons and whose cultural background demands that any hint of homosexual desire be punished. One of the most disturbingly impactful moments is when the narrator muses about how burning gay men alive is simply accepting in his homeland. It is truly chilling.

But Carsten does not entirely belong to this world, his is trans-cultural existence. Speaking several languages, Spanish, Somali, English, he navigates the America of the mid-90's not entirely as a foreigner but on occasion not quite as a native either. This experience of displacement is very much linked to his sense of identity.

Said identity, as already been mentioned but bears repeating, is under attack by his father who is almost always capitalized as 'Father'. The violence, both physical and emotional, to which Carsten is exposed to, from very early childhood up to the point the story proper starts, is nothing short of shocking and adds to the difficulty of reading **A Love**. As it should be. The desperate immediacy of the style turns the reader into a co-sufferer. It remains very personal and unique to the narrator but at the same time has a universality to it.

Despite its many themes that range from integration in American society to homophobia without forgetting artistic expression and self-identity of a young gay man, it never reads as a programmatic novel. Through and through, **A Love** is about experiences felt on the flesh and lived through. Which is not to say that there is no genuine happiness in this. There are lyrical moments, particularly when it comes to Carsten's interaction with his eventual boyfriend, Brett. These are not detached from everything else but often have a mellowness or intensity all of their own that do perfect justice to teenage love.

Above all, **A Love** is a novel that recognizes the complexities of life and then goes to present them in a honest, raw, painful and highly rewarding manner. The ending does seem rather abrupt but even that is perfectly in tune and coherent given how the novel functions. If there is one thing about it that could perhaps be improved, it is, ironically enough, the cover. I do not think it gives as much as a glimpse into the actual content and may something a disservice in that regard.

The fact that this is a debut work is truly exciting and leaves one very eager to read more from the author.

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## **Avid Reader says**

A Love Like Blood by Victor Yates

3 stars

M/M Romance

I was given this book for an honest review by Inked Rainbow Reads.

I wanted to really like this story - I tried very hard to get in to the flow of reading, but Yates' style and me - we just didn't mix well.

That being said, the story was well written, but I found it somewhat strange in how it flowed. It was incredibly descriptive and I liked how you were able to picture the scenes in your head as you were reading, however, it also became, at times, somewhat tedious.

Overall, this was a great story about a very taboo subject for Somali culture. I loved how you were given a glimpse of the culture, and even though Carsten's dad is less than agreeable, you can really see how their family dynamic has shaped the family as a whole.

While I did enjoy the premise of this story, it just didn't really work for me. However, I will not give up on Yates - his writing intrigues me.

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## **Elisa says**

A copy of this book was given to me by the author in exchange for an unbiased review.

Don't let the 3 star review fool you--I actually highly recommend you read this book. It offers such insight into Somali culture through the relationship between Carston and his father, but also in the way it was written. Carston's father is very violent towards his gay son, but it is rooted in the culture he was raised in. I honestly knew pretty much zero about Somali culture, let alone how homosexuals were treated. This definitely opened my eyes to the struggles of these young people and how scary it can be. We also got to see how Carston's father struggled with it too--he was supposed to basically disown his own son, but at the same time he still loved him.

The reason I had to give it a lower rating (although I still consider 3 stars to be good) is because it seemed very long winded for such a short story. It is explained in the book that the Somali language is very poetic, and I can see that shine through in the narrative. However, it was just a little too much for me. Although it mostly helped me visualize what was going on, it also sometimes left me confused about what I had just read. I also finished the book feeling like I had read a lot more than what actually happened in the story.

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## **Jendi says**

3.5 stars rounding up to 4. I received a free copy of this novel from the M/M Romance Group in exchange for an honest review.

Though there is a subplot of romance between teen boys, the central bond explored in this innovative coming-of-age novel is the intense love-hate relationship between Carsten, a closeted gay Somali 17-year-old in Detroit, and his violently homophobic father, Reed. Yates' exploration of the traumatic bond between father and son is painfully real, nuanced, and tragic. Out of the three brothers, Carsten bears the brunt of Reed's dictatorial expectations, yet is also closest to him, via their shared passion for their photography careers. The technology and metaphors of photography are used throughout the book to give beautiful and insightful descriptions of Carsten's inner world.

There are many heart-wrenching moments in the young man's inner monologue when he's forced to acknowledge that his father has given him the greatest gifts of his life as well as the worst pain. For instance, many of his prized cameras are "I'm sorry" presents from Reed after severe beatings. He has compassion for his father's own abuse history, without making excuses. Carsten's periodic acts of revenge and a startling act of violence at the end of the book show the young man that the family pattern of rage hasn't stopped with him, though one has hope that he will break the cycle because he took the risk of being true to himself. This is very true to how abusive families operate.

I'll admit I'm biased against abuser-reconciliation stories, but I didn't feel that Reed's last words in the book were wholly plausible. He seemed more like a man who'd disclose his tender feelings through action rather than words, even in extremis. It would have been enough to show him intervening to protect Carsten from danger.

The novel's poetic, image-rich, at times hallucinatory style was both impressive and frustrating to me as a reader. Each chapter would start in a different time and place, without enough contextual markers for me to tell whether something was a metaphor or a literal part of the scene. The "coffin" in the first chapter, for instance, turned out to be a camera case. About halfway through, I hit my stride in understanding how to find those clues, but I'm not sure I would have stuck with the book, if I hadn't committed to review it. That would have been a shame because the very slow-moving plot did pick up at the two-thirds mark, and some genuine changes occurred in the characters' lives.

I also enjoyed learning about the Somali-American experience through the viewpoint of someone like Carsten, who was fully immersed in the sights, smells, and tastes of his people's culture, yet enough of an outsider (because of his sexuality) to observe it critically. I'm glad this book took some risks, though they didn't all pay off for me.

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## **Hillary says**

I will start this review by saying that I won a copy of this book through a Goodreads giveaway.

Before I started reading the novel, I read the description and the back cover of the book to see what the novel was about. I was very intrigued and pleasantly surprised because it sounded like a book that touched many different and important topics such as race, culture, violence, family and sexuality to name a few.

My first thought was that it was going to be a strangely confusing novel due to the differences in topics that appeared in it and due to the length of the book as well. I figured that if it was a 400 page novel maybe all those topics could fit in their own sections and work out for readers to understand properly. However, this is a fairly tiny novel, so I thought that it was going to be all mashed together and that it would be hard to fully understand and follow properly. I must say that I was wrong. The author did a great job at taking all of these complicated and sometimes misunderstood topics and shined light on them in a new manner.

All the different topics meshed extremely well with one another. The basic storyline is that there is a Somali boy who is gay and who's father will kill him if he finds out since the father beats the boy on a regular basis for doing anything that he disagrees with. The boy hides behind his camera for protection and uses photography as a way of looking in the world and trying to understand it better.

I really enjoyed the way the story was written. The author wrote in a way that made it very easy for readers to picture the scenes happening in their heads while also adding a hint of darkness and mystery that made them go "eum okay.." (in a good way that makes them want to keep reading to figure out what happens next).

I recommend this novel to anyone who wants to read something different and out of the ordinary because I can guarantee, you have not read a book quite like this this one yet!

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## **Tracy Gilson says**

I received this book for free in exchange for an honest review. I was pleasantly surprised by this book. In the beginning I was finding Yates somewhat wordy in his descriptions. As I continued reading it was explained that Somali people tend to be wordy. I found that I got use to the wordiness and even enjoyed it. The story is of a 17 year old male of mixed race. There is not mother in the picture and he and his 2 brothers are being raised by their father. Carsten (the main character) and his father are photographers. There are many descriptions of taking pictures and analyzing his thoughts. Carsten and his father do not have a good relationship. His father is abusing and Carsten is often not able to express himself. Carsten loves men, not women. This is a very large taboo in the Somali culture, much as it is for many cultures. I feel sorry for Carsten in that he finds it difficult to be who he really is. The ending is amazing and sad. It is an excellent ending to the story, even though it is sad. I highly recommend this book and this author. I passed the book



along to my sister in-law. I hope she likes it.

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### **Ana says**

I had a bit of a hard time getting myself into the story. I think it wasn't the right book for me. I did enjoyed a lot of parts of it.

One of the things I liked the most, was the cultural background. It was something I've never read about and it was very interesting getting to know other people's beliefs. There was a lot of hate against women, not display as physical violence, but the way men were criticized for of having any feature that was consider women-like, felt very relevant and extremely realistic. There was some other parts that showed, in a very subtle way, how important the man was for that culture. I noticed that when Carsten refer to his father, most of the times, the word father was written in capital letter. I don't know if it was intended that way, but I felt like it was a way to give power to the name, something God-like, opposite to the mother's figure that was absent for most of the book.

The writing was good, but I find the pace a little slow and that made it a little hard to read for me. One of the biggest problems I have with the book, was the fact that it was very difficult to connect with any emotions. There was a melancholic feeling the whole time, but other than that, I feel like there was an important lack of emotions in the characters.

I didn't like Brett, I think he was unable to understand Carsten's situation and I don't think he even try. I didn't felt like the romance part was an important part of the book, but I guess it was intended that way. I really didn't mind, I wasn't looking for romance here.

In general it was ok, I didn't liked it that much, but I think a lot of reader would enjoy it. As I mention, the writing is really good.

\*I received a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review through the DBML program of the M/M Romance group

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### **Sofia says**

Lammy winner 2015

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### **Larry Benjamin says**

I loved this book for a variety of reasons, not least of which is the fact that it falls outside the standard white homonormative narrative. If you've read any of my blog posts you'll know that is my biggest peeve with so much gay fiction—it is so homogenous, so white, it leads to an erasure of gay people of color.

It can be a hard book to read; brutal and to the point, it underscores the horrors, both petty and damaging, rained down upon our gay youth, often by the very people who are supposed to love and protect them. Half

Cuban and half Somali, protagonist Carstyn Tynes' experience is singular and brings that horror to light.

New author, Yates uses photography as more than a way to provide insight into Carstyn; the ever present camera and what he sees through its lenses becomes almost another character. The camera's lens allows us to see what he sees. As he develops his prints, we can almost see him developing, growing into the man he will be, a man who can finally stand up to his father and for himself.

Another reason I loved this book is the language. The prose is lovely, if at times a bit overwrought. I felt sometimes Yates was using language to boast of his facility with words rather than to lead the narrative forward. But this was forgivable. He is talented and writes in a richly visual way you don't see often. It's his first book so I'm betting he'll gain some restraint with future books.

Among my favorite passages from the book are these:

"Seeing these slurs glued together in the soft air of sadness dissolves the letters into a handful of dust."

"I hold onto the words and press them down into memory like babies breathe in a bible."

A passage expressing the frustration of a gay youth trapped by impossible expectation that makes death seem the only way out: "Often, long-term prisoners commit suicide when their request for parole return denied. Recently, I started asking myself, what if I remain in confinement forever from father forcing me to marry my ex-girlfriend. In those moments, death seemed to me the quickest way to unglue the cinderblocks."

And this neat, brisk description of what it's like to be gay:

"I am a year away from marrying age, and every wrinkled face in my life is bullying me into a rented tuxedo to marry my ex-girlfriend. However, the feel of course facial hair rubbing against my jaw arouses me; not breasts, blunt bangs, lace or lipstick."

And a fundamental truth succinctly expressed: "If you can't resolve your problems in peace, you can't solve them in war."

This book is a Lambda Literary award finalist in the debut fiction category and quite rightly so. I look forward to his future books. Mr. Yates is a writer to watch.

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## **FantasyLiving says**

*An ARC was provided by the author in exchange for an honest review*

### **4 Hearts**

This story starts off with Carsten's scattered thoughts as he meets his neighbour, Brett, while moving into a new house with his father and two brothers. The flow was not what I am used to, and it was difficult at first to pick up the threads. But as the story moves, those disjointed thoughts start to bring the pieces of Carsten together. Being queer and living in a strictly religious household, with his abusive father who wants him to marry by eighteen, makes his secret all the more terrifying to reveal.

Once I understood the style, I really enjoyed this story. It is dark, and powerful. Carsten will do anything to earn his father's approval and love, spending his days trying to figure out how to be the image his father wants for him, and failing because it isn't who he is.

Photography is the only way Carsten and his father can bond, and through Carsten's perspective of the world through his lens, the reader learns the textures, angles, and shades of Carsten's life. From the sharp edges of violence, to the contradictory angles of Brett.

While the abuse is hard to read, it also gives the opportunity to learn how Carsten survives it. There is a fortitude that grounds Carsten in life. If he can live through his camera, the rest doesn't matter. His father's approval of his work is enough to get him through.

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### **Mary Allen says**

I did not finish this book as it is not my kind of a story, what I did read was written okay. I should have read the back of the book first.

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