

# Synopsis for Blood Never Lies

By Penelope Haines

## **2-line Summary:**

A girl rescues a Viking from the sea 1000 years ago and a tale of love and violence is born. Can that history reach through time and affect the lives of their 21<sup>st</sup> century descendants?

## **Short Synopsis:**

The DNA carried in our cells holds a living memory of our ancestors. When a girl rescues a Viking from the sea a thousand years ago, a tale of love and violence is born. Can that history reach through time and affect the lives of their 21<sup>st</sup> century descendants?

## **Medium Synopsis:**

All families have stories. All families have history reaching back across time to the ones who came before.

In the ninth century, an Irish healer rescues a Viking warrior from the sea. Can the story of Ciarnat and Thorkell reach through time and affect a sceptical 21st-century woman?

A thousand years have passed since Vikings raided the coastal villages of Ireland. The names and stories of those who suffered then has been lost, falling gently into oblivion, wiped from the written record.

But there's another invisible repository of history. Tied to every strand of DNA, borne in our blood and stamped into every cell of our bodies, is a living memory of our ancestors.

When Erin discovers she is pregnant, she's thrilled but troubled by terrible nightmares. Each night she returns to the same fiery scene of a woman forced to bear witness to an unspeakable atrocity. Soon she is physically reliving experiences from centuries earlier.

As past and present become inextricably entwined, a tale of violence a thousand years old threatens to repeat itself.

## **Interview type Synopsis:**

A girl rescues a Viking from the sea 1000 years ago and a tale of love and violence is born. Can that history reach through time and affect the lives of their 21<sup>st</sup> century descendants?

The plot of "Blood Never Lies," Penelope's sixth novel, was formed when Penelope and her husband sent swabs off to the National Geographic Genographic Project for DNA analysis.

When the reports came back, Penelope's results were straightforward – 100% Irish. It was her husband's results that surprised them, being an unexpected 58% Scandinavian and the rest a mix of British, and Southern European heritage.

"It seemed obvious to me that the most likely source of that Scandinavian DNA was the historical Viking incursions into Britain, and who isn't fascinated by Vikings?" Penelope asked, seizing the opportunity to write about them.

"Then again," Penelope added, "the whole matter of DNA fascinated me. There has been a lot of recent research into epigenesis – or the way in which external modifications to DNA can turn genes 'on' or 'off'. On an individual basis, the different combinations of genes switched on or off are what makes each one of us unique. Even more intriguingly, strong evidence exists that some of these changes, under stressful conditions, can get passed down multiple generations." "Blood Never Lies" twines those two themes into a complex and exciting novel. The tale romps along at a cracking pace, shifting in time between the ninth and the twenty-first centuries as the protagonists' stories unfold.

When Erin discovers she is pregnant, she is thrilled, but troubled by terrible nightmares. Each night she returns to the same fiery scene of a woman forced to bear witness to an unspeakable atrocity. Soon she is physically reliving experiences from centuries earlier.

As past and present become inextricably entwined, a tale of violence a thousand years old threatens to repeat itself.

### **3 Points of Interest about the Book's Content or Story**

#### **1. Vikings!**

A couple of years ago, my husband and I participated in the National Geographic Genographic Project and sent off our DNA for analysis. I've 'gifted' our results to my protagonists for this novel. My results, like Erin's, were straightforward. My ancestors clearly were not much given to wanderlust. It was my husband's results that intrigued me— what a mixture! As Fergal notes, "There'll be a story there, that's for sure." And so, a novel was born.

It seemed to me the most likely source of Scandinavian DNA was the Vikings, and who is not fascinated by them? They were one of the great exploring peoples of our planet. They settled westwards in Britain, Ireland, Iceland, Greenland and North America. Eastwards they

travelled down the mighty European rivers as far as Byzantium. They sailed the Mediterranean Sea. Between the tenth and fourteenth centuries, they formed the famous Varangian Guard who served as personal bodyguards to Byzantine emperors. Historically, contact between indigenous peoples and explorers resulted in atrocities, and Norsemen were known and feared wherever they went.

## **2. Epigenesis:**

The DNA test also provided the second theme for *Blood Never Lies*, namely how DNA forms and affects us all. For many years, when discussing identity, the argument raged between 'nature', as in inherited individuality, and 'nurture', those characteristics formed by upbringing, education and experience. Our new understanding of how DNA works shows that a simple binary approach was inadequate and inaccurate.

Most recently, a good deal of research has been done on epigenetics, which is defined by Oxford Languages as 'the study of changes in organisms caused by modifications of gene expression rather than alteration of the genetic code itself'. In other words, external modifications to DNA can turn genes 'on' or 'off'. On an individual basis, the different combinations of genes switched on or off are what makes each one of us unique.

More surprisingly, strong evidence exists that some of these changes, under certain stressful conditions, can get passed down multiple generations.

## **3. Music:**

The third strand of the novel was a bit of self-indulgence. I play the Irish harp myself, and introducing a bard and his daughter as principal characters in *Blood Never Lies* allowed me to insert both harp music and the instrument into the plot of the novel.