

When the past won't stay buried

Giles Blunt explores the roots of vengeance

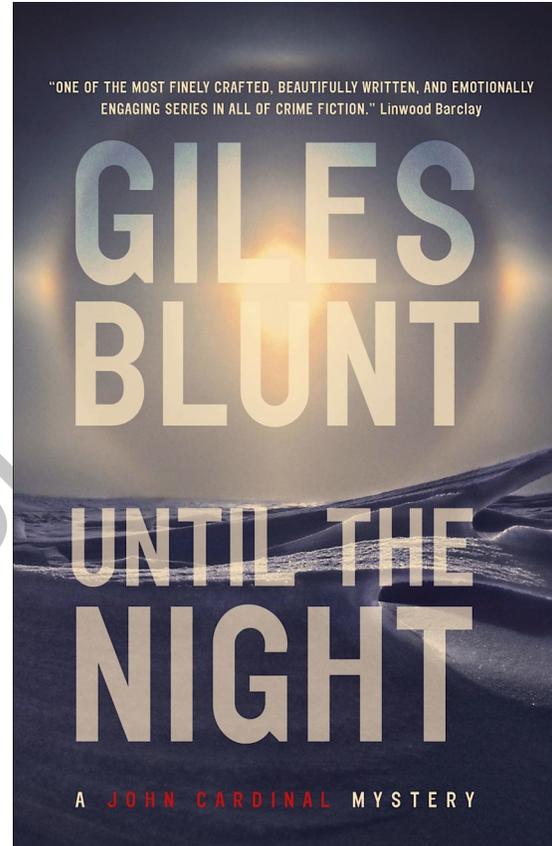
Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

Over the past dozen years author Giles Blunt has established himself as one of the very best crime writers around. His latest effort, *Until the Night*, cements his reputation in a layered tale about a series of killings that trace their origins to dark deeds committed decades earlier. It is one of Blunt's very best—which, if you know his work, is saying a great deal.

WHEN A BODY IS FOUND in a motel outside of Algonquin Bay, Inspector John Cardinal and longtime ally Sergeant Lise Delorme head for the crime scene. They find the coroner standing over the remains of a middle-aged man who died when his killer stood on his throat. A seemingly straightforward, if brutal, case of adultery gone wrong. Adding to the puzzle, Laura Rettig, the married woman he'd been having an affair with, has gone missing.

Delorme is more than a little piqued when she learns that Vernon Loach, a junior member of the department, has been assigned as the lead detective on the case. Arrogant and sexist, Loach is an import from Toronto, where he made a name for himself solving homicides; he might be a mere constable for the moment—the result of his recently transferring to Algonquin Bay—but there's no denying his reputation.



BEFORE LONG IT'S DISCOVERED that Laura Rettig had also had an affair with Leonard Priest, Delorme and Cardinal pay him a visit. Seldom has a man been so inaptly named: Priest is a strip-club owner and a cunning and unscrupulous predator, who enjoys playing cat-and-mouse games with the police. Utterly amoral, he takes pleasure in manipulating those around him for his own ends. Two years earlier Priest had walked away from a murder charge; the

victim, Laura Lacroix, was never found, and the Crown Attorney dropped the case for lack of evidence. Cardinal is convinced of Priest's guilt, and would love to nail him, but the man currently serving time in Kingston for the crime is a bit simple, and unswervingly loyal to Priest. For the moment, then, the case is stalled.

As much to goad him as anything else, Delorme asks Priest where he would take a kidnapped woman for sexual purposes. His response is surprising: he names an abandoned lodge in the woods, some distance away. Suspecting that's where Priest had taken Lacroix, Delorme decides to have a look. To her astonishment she actually finds a woman's body, but it is not Lacroix's. The woman has clearly been murdered. Can Priest be so brazen to hand the police the body of yet another of his victims?

CONVINCED THAT LEONARD PRIEST was involved in the murder of the woman in the lodge, Delorme learns that the two shared a connection, and decides, without clearing it with Cardinal or her superiors, to go undercover at Priest's sex club. Priest is not long in discovering her ruse, and taunts her mercilessly, playing on her own sexual fears and menacing her for his own selfish ends.

If this were the only narrative thread in the tale, *Until the Night* would still be a very good book. But there is a parallel narrative unfolding as well. In the early

1990s a team of Arctic researchers based in the far north found themselves in the middle of a crisis. One of the men was having an affair with the wife of the lead scientist, and it created predictable tensions within the tiny group. The issue festered and grew until it finally erupted in a deadly confrontation between the two men. Then, before it could be resolved, nature intervened and more people died. The remaining members of the team struggled to make contact with the outside world, their only hope of survival. The event is seemingly unrelated to the recent events in Algonquin Bay, but in the enclosed world of Northern Ontario it seems nothing happens in isolation.

One of the most original and atmospheric thrillers in many years

A DEFT EXPLORATION of the corrosive effects of obsession, *Until the Night* cements Giles Blunt's reputation as one of the very best crime writers around. In the hands of a lesser talent the various plots and sub-plots could easily have become confused or worse, simply unbelievable. But Blunt adroitly weaves together these disparate threads to create one of the most original and convincing thrillers in many years. The characters are all-too-believable, the plot is clever, with plenty of twists and turns, and the book will keep you on the edge of your seat until the final satisfying page.

Jim Napier is a crime-fiction reviewer based in Canada. His book reviews and author interviews have been featured in several Canadian papers as well as on such websites as *Spinetingler Magazine*, *The Rap Sheet*, *January magazine*, *Reviewing the Evidence*, *Crime Time*, *Shots Magazine* and *Type M for Murder*, as well as on his own award-winning crime-fiction site, <http://deadlydiversions.com/>