

# The Past as Prologue

## *Canadian crime writer shines*

### *Suspended Sentences*

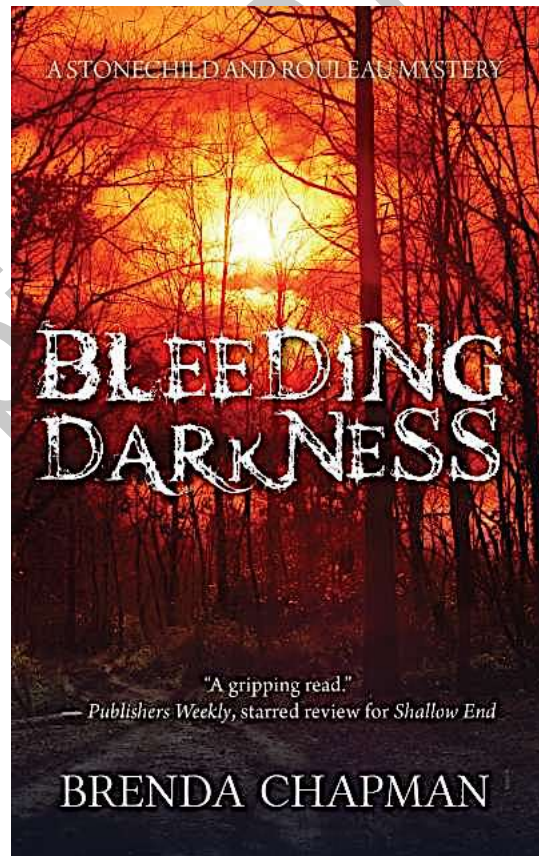
by Jim Napier

As the patriarch of the McKenna family lies on his deathbed in a Kingston hospital, the other members of the family come together to mourn his passing. David McKenna has terminal cancer, and his final days are marked by pain and painkillers, and hallucinations—or perhaps unwelcome memories.

David's wife Evelyn struggles to dominate her adult children. The brood includes brothers Adam McKenna and his wife Mona, Tristan McKenna and his pregnant wife Vivian, and their sister Lauren, the free spirit in the family who has never achieved recognition by her mother for her own accomplishments in life.

Making matters worse, the McKenna's troubled family past is about to resurface and take control of their lives. Years earlier a close friend of the family had been violently murdered, and one of them had been widely suspected of the crime. Although the evidence had been insufficient to bring anyone to trial, relatives of the

victim still live in Kingston, and still harbour their suspicions.



Fast forward to today, and the family's troubles resurface when one of their own goes missing, and is found in a nearby wooded area strangled to death. The spotlight turns on the family members, and their tensions and jealousies soon come to light. A few years earlier

Adam had penned a best-selling novel; but sales had waned and his family, which includes a young child with special needs, had struggled to make ends meet. Recently Adam had been working on a second book that he hoped would reverse their fortunes. The relationship between Tristan and his wife Vivian falls short of a happy marriage, while Lauren wages an ongoing personal fight against depression, drugs and alcohol abuse, and casual sex.

While all this is going on, aboriginal Kingston police detective Kala Stonechild tries to cope with her own family issues. Her sister Rose Dumont is in prison in Quebec, and Kala has assumed responsibility for her niece, Dawn, who is living with her in Kingston where she struggles to define her place as an aboriginal loner in a nearby mostly-white, mostly cliquish high school. Rose has learned that her husband, Paul Dumont, has recently been paroled from prison and is seeking information about his daughter Dawn; Rose implores Kala to watch for him and make sure that the two are kept apart.

It is Stonechild who discovers the body of one of the McKenna women, setting off an investigation

that reaches back to an earlier death, when one of the family had been suspected of murder. Kala finds herself working with another officer who is highly ambitious and critical of her abilities. Her usual ally, Staff Sergeant Jacques Rouleau, has temporarily taken over from Captain Heath, who is on leave, and cannot act as a buffer between Stonechild and others on the case. Between the conflicts within the department, efforts by the McKenna family to deflect attention from themselves in this most recent murder, and a pair of elderly reclusive neighbours who speak broken English and seem to know little about the death, Kala Stonechild has her work cut out for her.

*Bleeding Darkness* is the fifth novel in the Stonechild and Rouleau series, and is a well-paced and well-structured whodunit that effortlessly combines contemporary tensions among family members with events rooted in a tortured past. Chapman shows once again why she is on the rise among thoughtful and insightful crime writers. *Bleeding Darkness* is not only a good Canadian crime novel—it is a good crime novel, period.

§Since 2005 Jim Napier's reviews and interviews have appeared in several Canadian newspapers and on various crime fiction and literary websites, including his own award-winning site, *Deadly Diversions*. His first crime novel, *Legacy*, was published in the Spring of 2017.

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