

You Can't Go Home Again

Latest Tour de Force by Anne Emery

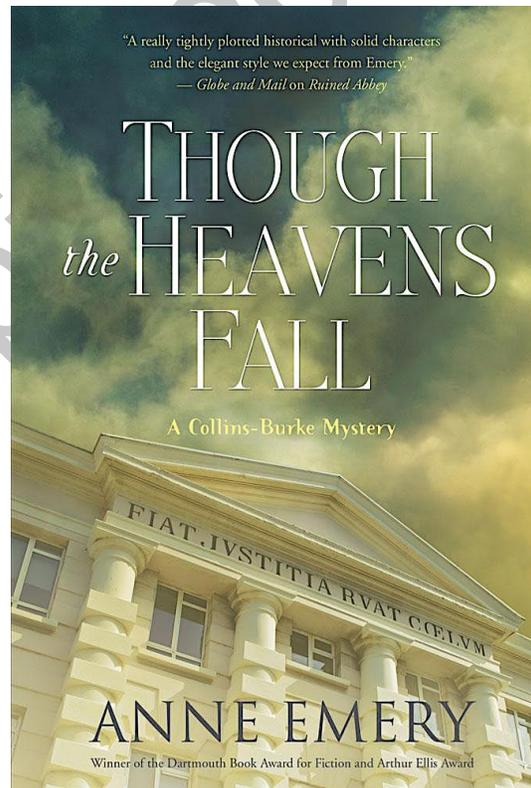
Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

1995: When Halifax lawyer Monty Collins travels to Ireland to do some legal work for his firm, his good friend Father Brennan Burke takes advantage of the opportunity to revisit the country of his birth. Much of his family had remained in Northern Ireland during what was euphemistically termed "The Troubles." But now events are inching toward reconciliation, and a compromise solution seems to be on the horizon.

It all begins innocently enough. In Belfast Monty Collins is preparing a case defending a corporate client when a young woman asks to see him. She is the daughter of a man who apparently died as a result of a fall from a bridge. But she insists he had been killed. After his death her mother received money anonymously for some time, which helped meet family expenses; but the money suddenly stopped, and the daughter is convinced it was hush money, or perhaps conscience money, to cover her father's death. She asks Monty Collins to look into it, and

although he is not optimistic about the outcome, he agrees. It is a decision that will come back to haunt him.



Meanwhile Brennan Burke is reconnecting with members of his extended family, and in the microcosm of Northern Ireland that means being drawn into the politics of that troubled land. The shooting might have stopped, but the tensions between the two sides

has not abated, and it wouldn't take much for the uneasy peace to fall apart. Daily life in Belfast is marked by army patrols and random stop-and-searches, graffiti-covered walls separating the belligerents on both sides of the conflict, and the bombed-out ruins of crime scenes that have become icons in the conflict.

Brennan's cousin Ronan Burke had gone to prison more than once during the conflict, but now released he is hugely popular among the Republicans, and an odds-on favourite to take a leading role in the proposed joint political assembly once it comes about. Lurking not far beneath the surface, however, are age-old enmities, and deeds gone unpunished on both sides. Brennan is drawn into the intrigue, and when his role is discovered, he finds himself thrown into prison, awaiting trial in a courtroom in which the usual safeguards guaranteeing the rights

of the accused no longer apply, and charged with a serious crime for which he could spend the rest of his days in a place of unspeakable degradation.

The tenth volume in the Collins-Burke series, *Though the Heavens Fall* chronicles the times leading up to the ceasefire and subsequent establishment of a fragile peace. It is impeccably researched, the many harrowing tales described within its pages each based on fact. A dark novel, by far the darkest in the series so far, it will leave even the most casual reader deeply disturbed that these sorts of things can happen in a nation that regards itself as civilised. *Though the Heavens Fall* is a fine example of how, in the hands of a skilled and dedicated writer, a novel can enlarge our understanding of complex issues in the real world. Clearly one of the finest reads of 2018.

Previously posted on *Reviewing The Evidence*, December 2018.

§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 crime novel *Legacy* was published in the Spring of 2017 and the next in the series, *Ridley's War*, is scheduled to launch in the Spring of 2019. He can be reached at jnapier@deadlydiversions.com