

# The Lighter Side of Crime

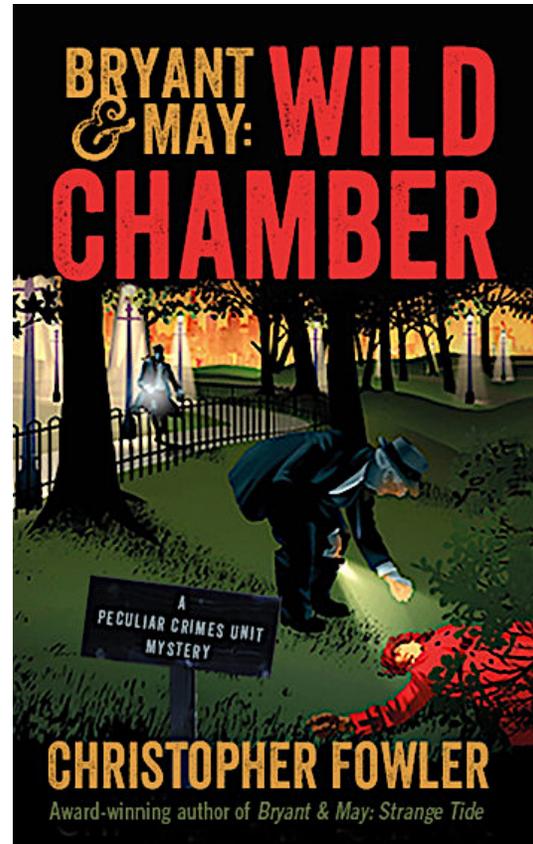
## *Fowler proves even murder can be fun*

### *Suspended Sentences*

by Jim Napier

London's famed green spaces have become the locii of a series of murders, and the eclectic group of detectives that make up the Peculiar Crimes Unit have been tasked with catching the killer. In one of their more baffling puzzles to date septuagenarian sleuths Arthur May and John May call on the talents of such improbably-named friends and foes as Dante August, Walsingham Pew, Peregrine Summerfield and Sun Dark to unravel a mystery rooted in a traffic accident that takes a young boy's life, and will move on to claim more lives before the tale has ended.

London-based crime writer Christopher Fowler has penned more than forty crime novels, including over a dozen stories featuring Bryant and May, the off-the-rails duo of aging detectives charged with solving crimes that baffle their more conventional colleagues in the Metropolitan Police. However, it doesn't help that the already-eccentric Arthur Bryant has begun to have visions



which include conversations with such figures as Samuel Pepys, Queen Elizabeth II, and William Schwenck Gilbert, of Gilbert and Sullivan fame. Throw into the mix a high-flying City type who's just lost his job and is hopelessly in debt, a avaricious schemer bent on making money out of the crime wave hitting London's parks, and

Fowler's unmatched ability to fashion dialogue that ventures into the bizarre, and you have a sure-fire recipe for one of the most hilarious and entertaining series of comic crime stories to be found today. Witness the following exchange involving Arthur Bryant, his landlady, and John May:

*'Can you not bring up body parts where there's food about?'* cried Alma, exasperated. *'A human being is not a turkey. Or a halibut. You have no idea what I go through, Mr. May. This is a council flat: we're not allowed to make any alterations. He took the floor up!'*

*I wanted to see if a corpse would fit underneath it,'* said Bryant reasonably.

*'And you encourage him,'* she accused. *'Every day there's a new problem. He should never have had that locust farm in here. There used to be a topiary by our main entrance. Then the drains caught fire. And he threw next door's cat out of the window.'*

*'It was on a parachute,'* Bryant pointed out. *'It's amazing how they always land on their feet.'*

*Alma would not be mollified. 'Mr. Pitt downstairs thinks I've got Care in the Community people up here. What am I supposed to say to my ladies from the church when they come round for hymn practice?'*

*'You could invite him to attend,'* said May, amused.

*'And have him telling them about the seven levels of hell again? Bringing out his picture books of demons pulling the heads off toddlers.'*

*'That was the illustrated Malleus Maleficarum, madam. A rare and marvellous artefact. I was trying to teach them about Asmodeus, the spirit of vengeful lust.'*

*'They don't need to know about that. They're married.'*

And so it goes. The result is a breathtakingly fresh view of the darker side of life, with a challenging puzzle thrown in for good measure. Small wonder that the Bryant and May stories have been thriving for the past fourteen years; the world would be a far less interesting place were it not for the tradition, lovingly preserved, of Great British Eccentrics.

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Since 2005 more than 500 of Jim Napier's reviews and interviews have appeared in several Canadian newspapers and on such websites as *Spinetingler*, *The Rap Sheet*, *Shots Magazine*, *Crime Time*, *Reviewing The Evidence*, *January* magazine, the

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