

# Mayhem Under the Mistletoe

## *Christmas can be murder...*

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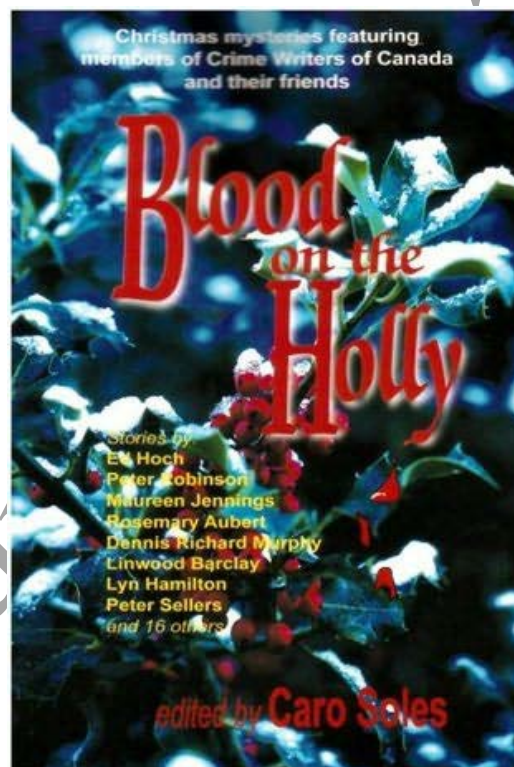
### *Suspended Sentences*

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by Jim Napier

It's that time of year again. You know: the four-letter word: s-n-o-w. The retailers are wringing their hands: is it glee, or panic? Less than a month to Christmas, and if you didn't already know that, then you haven't been to the big box stores, jostling with people of all shapes, sizes and dispositions, trying to find that perfect gift for a loved one, the co-worker who covered for you when you took the day off, or the neighbour who helped you shovel your driveway after the snow-plow passed for the third time. Well, look no further. Here's a selection of gifts that don't require batteries, are easy to wrap, and will bring more hours of joy than a squirrel in a dog pound.

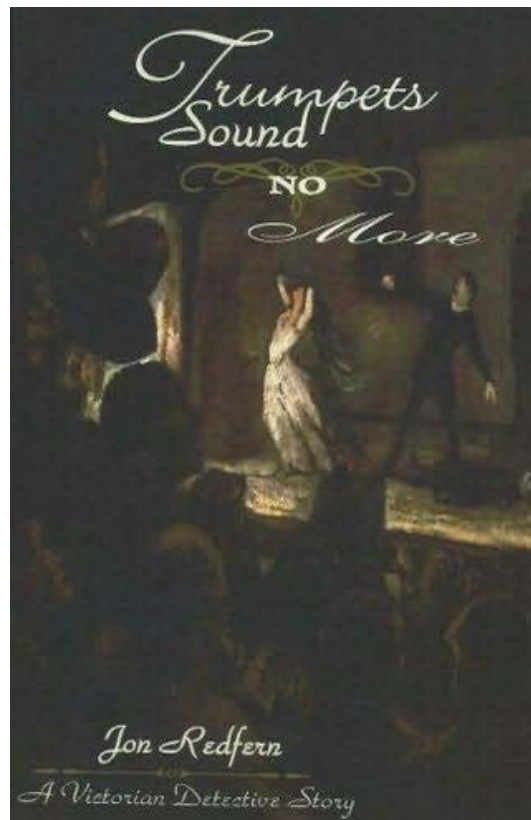
And with the last of your Christmas shopping finally out of the way, just think: you can begin fantasizing about the coming of Spring.



**Caro Soles (ed.)**  
***Blood on the Holly***  
**(Baskerville Books, 2007)**

Just in time for Christmas, a cunning collection of two dozen short stories focusing on felonies in the festive season. Many of Canada's leading crime writers are represented, including Lyn Hamilton, Peter Robinson, Linwood Barclay, Mary Jane Maffini, Maureen Jennings, Rick Mofina—there simply isn't room to list them all. Curl up with such goodies as “*The Hounds of Winter*,” “*Christmas Can Be a Killer*,” “*The Parrot and Wild Mushroom*”

*Stuffing*,” “*A Bigfoot Christmas*,” and “*Chestnut Roasting*.” Something for everyone here, from the Christmas curmudgeon to the truly depraved. Who could resist?

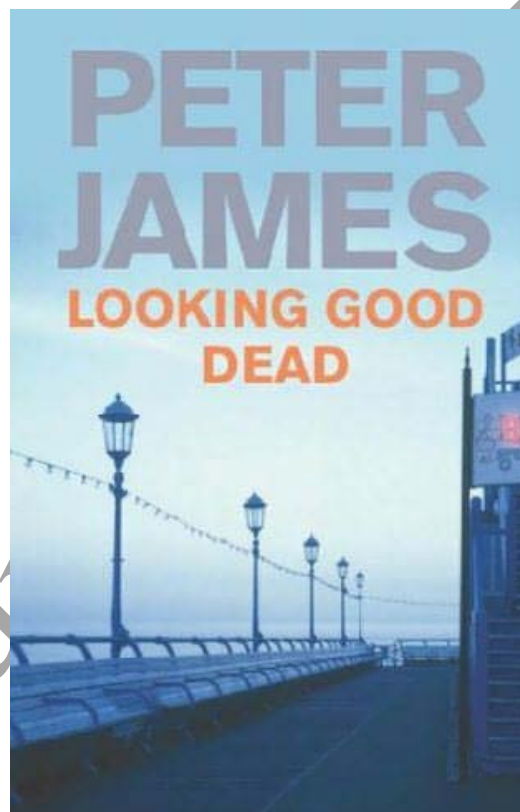


**Jon Redfern**  
***Trumpets Sound No More***  
**(RendezVous Crime, 2007)**

Another entry in the seasonal sweeps, this time by Ellis Award-winning author Jon Redfern. His latest is a Victorian detective story set in the theatre world of London during the 1840's. A rising entrepreneur in the theatre world, Samuel Cake has been found brutally murdered in his home. Clues are thin on the ground: a collection of promissory notes, a contentious contract, an ivory-headed walking stick. The case falls to Inspector Owen Endersby, who is working under an ultimatum from his superior, Superintendent Borne: solve

the case and make an arrest before Christmas, just six days away.

A well-plotted tale rich in period atmosphere and detail, and packed with engaging characters, *Trumpets Sound No More* will earn new fans for this talented and emerging writer.

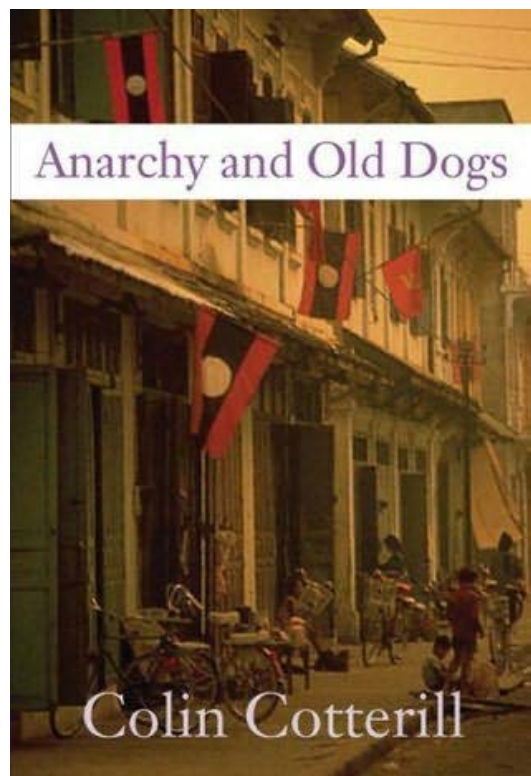


**Peter James**  
***Looking Good Dead***  
**(Pan Books, 2007)**

I last reviewed a Peter James novel—*Dead Simple*— in March of 2007, and at the time I noted the author's uncanny ability to get into his reader's minds and create an almost primal sense of fear. A gripping storyline, combined with menacing characters and a strong sense of place, have become hallmarks of James' novels, and his latest is no exception. The story begins innocuously enough: a man on a train has left a CD behind on his seat, and a fellow

passenger attempts to return it. When he witnesses a murder in the process, the samaritan is warned not to go to the police; he does so anyway, and before long the photographs of his wife and child are posted on the internet, listing them as dead. It falls to Detective Superintendent Roy Grace to prevent internet fiction from becoming grim reality.

Superbly conceived and deftly realized, *Looking Good Dead* is a worthy entry in the Roy Grace series. Once started, this is a compelling novel that you will not put down.

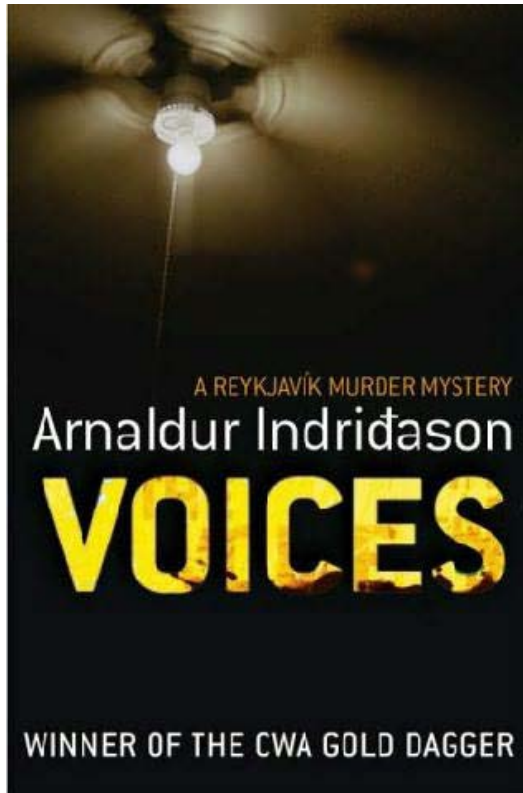


**Colin Cotterill**  
*Anarchy and Old Dogs*  
(Knopf Canada, 2007)

The most recent novel from the pen of British-born Colin Cotterill, who now makes his home in Thailand. In this, the fourth of his series revolving around Laotian national coroner Dr. Siri

Paiboun, the aging sleuth is confronted by a baffling case: a man has been run down by a truck. A retired dentist, he was blind; yet he had come into town to retrieve a letter written in code and in invisible ink. The man's widow informs him that the content of the letter concerns moves in a long-running chess game her late husband was playing, but Dr. Siri is not convinced. He enlists some improbable help, including a member of the national politburo and a transvestite fortune-teller to unravel the mystery, and what he discovers will threaten the very existence of the Laotian government.

Typical of the highly original tales that flow from the pen of this gifted writer, *Anarchy and Old Dogs* will appeal to readers who enjoy challenging puzzles rooted in exotic settings.



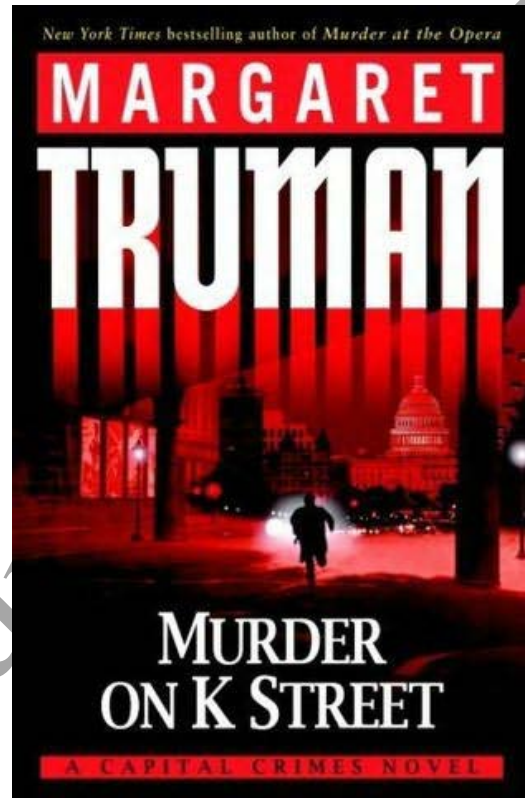
**Arnaldur Indriðason**  
*Voices*  
(Vintage Books, 2007)

In yet another exotic tale for the Christmas season, a voice from an entirely different tradition. Arnaldur Indriðason is a highly-respected crime writer based in Iceland. His books are regularly best-sellers in that nation of avid readers. His first novel, *Sons of Dust*, is credited with kickstarting a new, edgier tradition in Icelandic crime fiction, and he is rapidly winning fans abroad. He has won several awards for his writing, including the 2005 CWA Gold Dagger.

Shortly before Christmas in Reykjavik a hotel doorman and occasional Santa Claus is found dead in his room. Dressed in his Santa costume, he has been stabbed through the heart. He has defensive wounds on his hands, and his trousers are down around his ankles.

There is a condom dangling from his privates, and on his bedside table is a lone book: *A History of the Vienna Boys' Choir*.

And if that doesn't get your interest, my friend, then you simply have no curiosity.



**Margaret Truman**  
*Murder on K Street*  
(Ballantine Books, 2007)

We return to more familiar ground with this, the final selection of my Christmas picks. The Grand Old Dame of American Crime Fiction, Margaret Truman—the daughter of former U.S. President Harry S. Truman—has been writing murder mysteries since 1980. The 24<sup>th</sup> novel in her Capital Crimes series, *Murder on K Street* centers on the plight of Senator Lyle Simmons, a presidential aspirant who arrives home from a fund-raiser to find that his wife has been bludgeoned to death. He turns

to an old friend, ex-District Attorney Philip Rotondi, to help him. But it is not long before Simmons' estranged daughter accuses him of the murder, despite a roomful of witnesses. When powerful lawyer and lobbyist Jonell Marbury enters the fray, Rotondi hires ex-attorneys Mac and Annabel Smith to help get to the bottom of things; and another woman is killed before Rotondi is forced to confront his own past to solve the case.

A fast-paced and entirely credible portrayal of the murky world of Washington politics, *Murder on K Street* is a well-crafted and articulate mystery that will appeal to Truman's many fans. An easy introduction to her works, and if you enjoy it you have lots more reading in front of you.

So there you have it: half a dozen tomes for the Christmas season, either for giving or for receiving. There's something for almost everyone on this list, but you might want to make sure that you match them up right...

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