

Curl up with a cozy crime novel delivers what it promises

Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

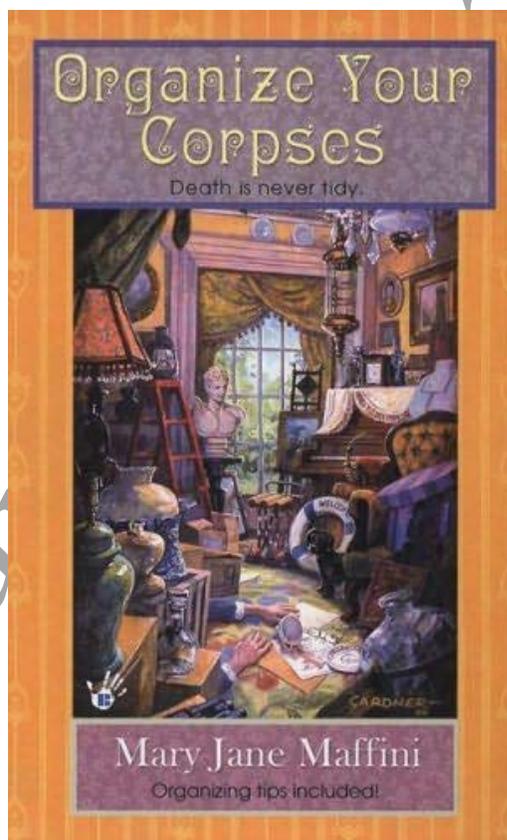
Summer time, and the living is easy. Time to kick back and relax. Have a few friends over for barbeque and drinks. Send the kids off to the neighbours – or even better, to a camp. Take advantage of the brief interlude between Spring thaw and frost-bite that we Canadians doggedly (and with some violence to the English language) call Summer.

Like a rosé wine, light reading also beckons us. Who wants to tackle *Dr. Zhivago* or *A Brief History of Quantum Physics* in a lawn chair while the kids frolic in the pool? If ever there is an ideal time for curling up with a cozy, this is it, and this week's novel is a perfect choice.

Mary Jane Maffini

I last looked at Canadian author Mary Jane Maffini in July of 2006, when I reviewed her engaging tale, *The Dead Don't Get Out Much*. The title speaks volumes about Mary Jane's take on the world: most events, however serious, have their lighter side, and it's her mission to identify it, bring it out, and flog it for all it's worth.

Her credentials for this task are impeccable. Mary Jane is the author of three distinct series of novels, each featuring a female amateur sleuth: the Ottawa-based Camilla MacPhee series, the Fiona Silk series set in West Quebec, and her latest, the Charlotte Adam series



set in upper New York state. She has twice received an Arthur Ellis Award for Best Short Stories. A former president of the Crime Writers of Canada, she received the Derrick Murdoch Award in 2006 for her contributions to the CWC. Not least, *The Dead Don't Get Out Much* was nominated for a Barry Award for Best Paperback Original, and recently was optioned for a Canadian television series.

Mary Jane was born in Sydney, Nova Scotia, and graduated from Dalhousie

University. She and her husband Giulio, together with their two dachshunds Daisy and Lily, live in Ottawa, where she is a member of the *Ladies' Killing Circle*. You have been warned.

Organize Your Corpses
(Berkley Prime Crime, 2007)

Charlotte Adams has carved out for herself one of those 21st-century professional niches that simply didn't exist in earlier, simpler times: she is a Personal Organizer. Drawing on her own skills and obsessions, Charlotte brings order to the chaos that the rest of us so happily endure; so it is particularly distressing when she finds her own life turned upside down. "Hellfire" Henley, a retired (and widely detested) ex-schoolteacher, has hired Charlotte to find some missing papers in a debris-strewn mansion formerly inhabited by Henley's late cousin, Randolph. Charlotte arrives to tackle the job, accompanied by her pet dachshunds, Truffles and Sweet Marie. The inquisitive canines immediately run amuck in the house, and when Charlotte hears them barking she runs to discover Miss Henley's body under a pile of newspaper bundles, her head crushed by a beam. Things go from bad to worse when the police view the death as a homicide, and Charlotte becomes their suspect of choice. Not especially surprising considering that Pepper Monahan, the detective on the case, suspects Charlotte of having made a pass at her husband. Ah, life in a small town.

With her rational take on the world and her obsession to take charge of events around her, there is no way Charlotte is going to take things lying down: she is determined to sort out the tangled mess that has made her her own best client. Recognising the need to draw on all her resources, Charlotte enlists the aid of

those around her, including Jack Reilly, her landlord and aspiring-bike-shop-owner, Rose Skipowski, an eccentric widow with a cat named Hairball, and Lilith, an ex-caregiver at Stone Wall Farm, a local nursing home where the victim's nearest relative languishes.

But as the bodies pile up, even Charlotte is finally forced to admit that things look bleak indeed. On the lam from Detective Monahan, her photograph highlighting the Six O'clock News, and her small Miata sports car all-too-recognizable in the small town, Charlotte Adams is forced to concentrate all her organizational skills on staying out of jail long enough to discover just who is dispatching the good denizens of Woodbridge – and why.

Dark humour abounds

Organize Your Corpses is a witty, antic take on greed, suspicion and petty jealousies in a small town. It's a cleverly plotted tale, full of twists and turns and original characters, and packed full of Mary Jane's characteristically dark humour in the guise of household tips: when Charlotte discovers a body under a pile of debris, she dryly observes "Never place a large object over a smaller one."

Definitely the lighter side of crime.

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