

# The British are Coming – again!

*UK crime writers just keep getting better and better*

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## *Suspended Sentences*

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by Jim Napier

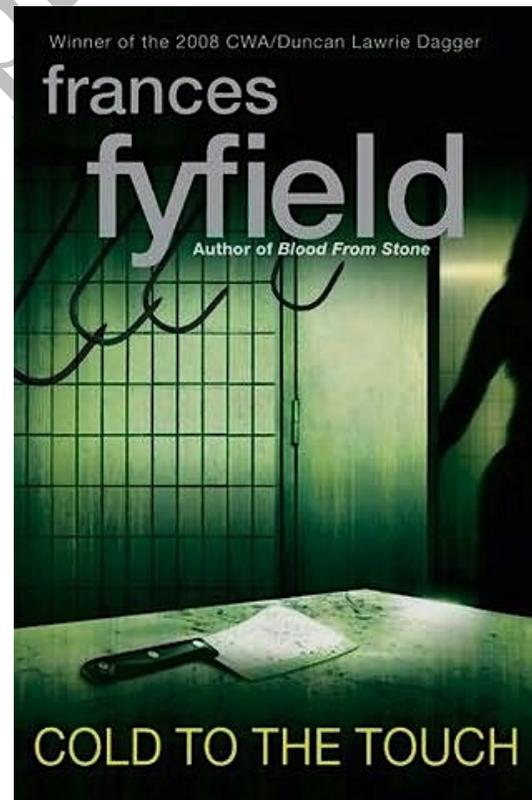
From the nineteen-twenties into the sixties authors Dorothy Sayers, Margery Allingham, and Agatha Christie utterly dominated the genre of British crime writing. Much is made of that era, since dubbed the Golden Age of crime fiction, and deservedly so. But perspectives on current times, as any historian will tell you, are often harder to come by. Inundated by all sorts of novels available in bookstores and on the internet, readers may justly wonder whether British crime fiction has seen its salad days.

Happily, nothing could be further from the truth. In addition to such well-established crime writers as Ian Rankin, Denise Mina, Anne Perry and Peter James, bookstore shelves are graced with many other British authors whose works also explore established themes from a fresh perspective. Some of these writers have been around for quite a while, but might not be well known to some readers. For your enjoyment, then, here is a selection of some of the best in contemporary British crime fiction, each exploring complex characters immersed in gripping personal crises that will resonate with many readers.

**Frances Fyfield,**  
***Cold to the Touch***  
(Sphere/Little Brown, 2009)

With two dozen novels to her credit, along with a 2008 Duncan Lawrie Dagger for *Blood From Stone*, Frances

Fyfield has long since shed the title of up-and-coming. But although her works are sold around the world, Fyfield (Frances Hegarty in real life) remains somewhat less well known to the casual reader in North America. Drawing on her previous experience as a solicitor for Britain's Crown Prosecution Service, Fyfield shows an uncanny ability for exploring the minds of damaged and twisted people, both victims and villains, and has produced some of the finest psychological thrillers around today.



*Cold to the Touch* is the tale of London-based Jessica Hurly, a troubled young

woman obsessed with an older man. At the same time, she longs to return to the village of her childhood, where her bitter and estranged mother still lives. Jessica will make that journey, though not, certainly, as she had expected or would have wished. And her reappearance in the village will set off a chain of events that no one can control.

Fyfield's stories derive their considerable impact from the nuanced and layered characters that populate her pages. Her novels are all about character and setting, rather than action and plot. Like Fyfield's other works, *Cold to the Touch* is an insightful narrative about flawed and damaged people coping with a world beyond their control. It is a fine tale, and readers will not come away untouched.

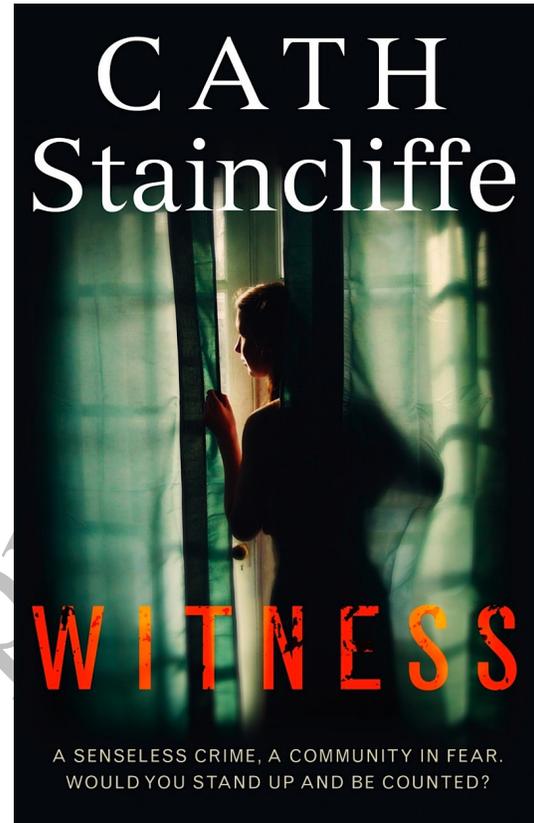
**Cath Staincliffe,**  
*Witness*

(Constable & Robinson, 2011)

Fans of British crime drama might recall the ITV series, *Blue Murder*, filmed from 2003-2009 and televised in North America more recently. Its talented author, Cath Staincliffe, has penned two series and three standalones, and one of her best is *Witness*, Staincliffe's most recent foray into the complex world where criminal acts intrude into the lives of ordinary people with gripping results.

In her latest foray into the world of crime, four people have each witnessed the mindless drive-by shooting of a teenaged boy, well liked in the neighbourhood. The police desperately need their help in arresting and prosecuting the killers, but each of the witnesses finds themselves torn between public duty and private fears. The witnesses include Fiona, a midwife who suffers panic attacks in the wake of the killing;

Mike, a delivery driver whose wife pressures him to put family first; Cheryl, a single mother who fears for her own child; and Zak, a calculating homeless man who seeks to trade his testimony for a new life.



Told from each of the character's point of view, *Witness* skillfully explores the complex issue of what each of us would do if called upon to bear witness against cold-blooded killers. It is an insightful and evocative journey, one that will stay with readers for a long while, and will spur them to explore Staincliffe's other works.

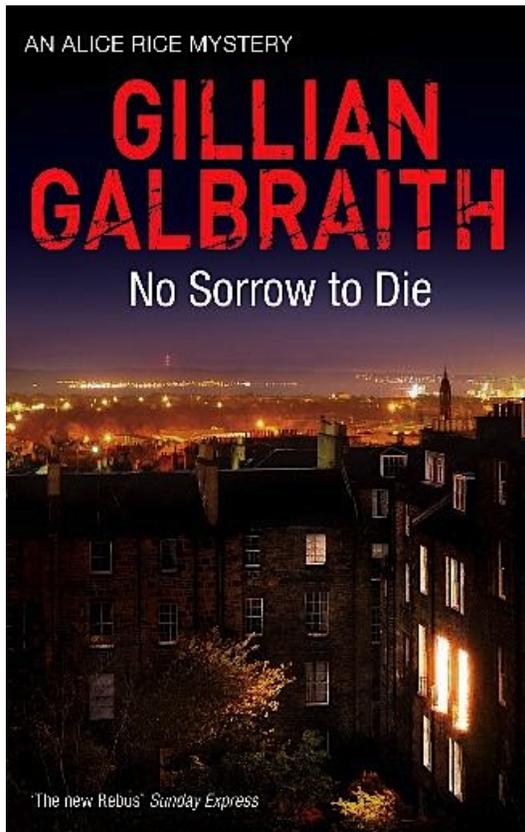
**Gillian Galbraith,**  
*No Sorrow to Die*  
(Polygon/Birlinn, 2010)

Having penned a new crime novel over each of the past four years, Gillian Galbraith is just hitting her stride as an emerging writer to take note of. The

Scottish-born novelist cannily draws upon her roots for the settings of her tales. *In No Sorrow to Die* Edinburgh Detective Sergeant Alice Rice is confronted by a particularly troubling case in which a woman awakes from having spent the previous evening with

As good as these novels are, many other fine British crime tales await your discovery. Definitely worth looking at are S. J. Bolton, *Awakening* (Transworld, 2009), Belinda Bauer, *Darkside* (Simon & Schuster, 2011), and Sophie Hannah, *Lasting Damage* (Penguin Canada, 2011).

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her lover to find her invalid husband's throat slit from ear to ear. She is the obvious suspect of choice: her lover had been her husband's doctor. What unfolds is a spellbinding tale about the corrosive effects of infidelity and suspicion, cleverly wrapped around a first-rate suspense tale seasoned with subplots and red herrings, distinctive characters and compelling dialogue. Galbraith absolutely nails the atmosphere. If you haven't run across her works before, seek them out; you won't be disappointed.