

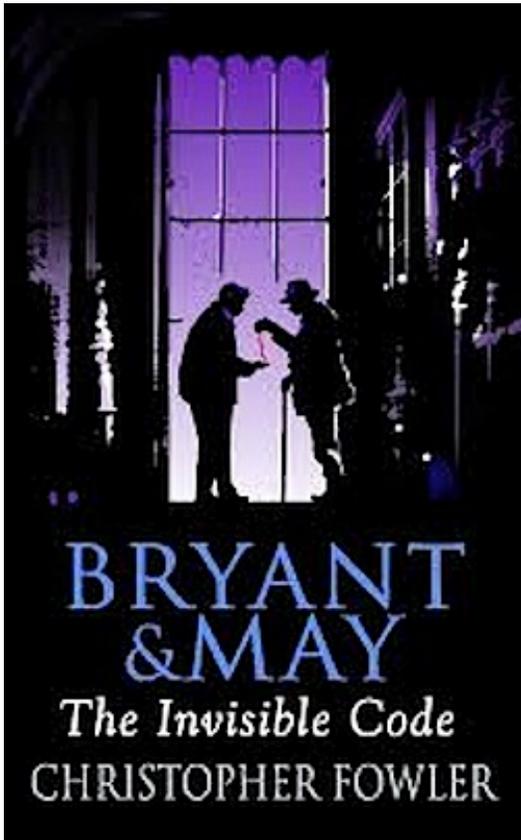
A Clutch of Cozies

Holiday reading designed to amuse

Suspended Sentences

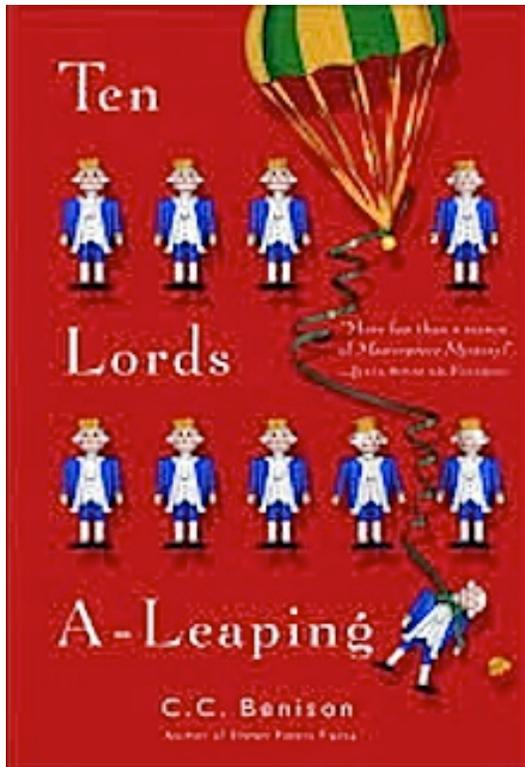
by Jim Napier

With a surfeit of novels crowding bookstore shelves about serial killers, vampires, and missing children, a change of literary tone is called for as the festive season approaches. So here is a selection of tales that, in the best tradition of seasonal cozies, offer little in the way of violence, and much in the way of escape and amusement. Happy holiday reading!



Bryant and May and the Invisible Code, by Christopher Fowler

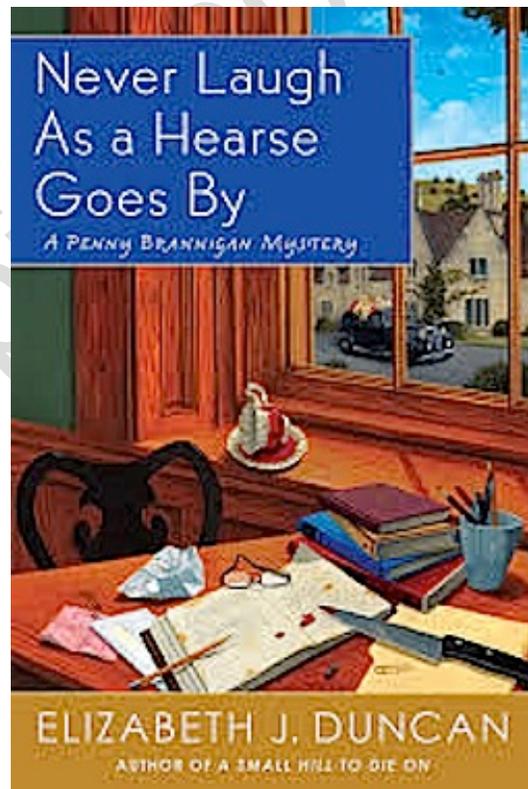
Christopher Fowler is the progenitor of one of the more slyly original crime fiction series to appear in recent years. Based in a warehouse in London, octagenarian sleuths Arthur Bryant and John May are a pair of out-of-touch sleuths with an uncanny knack for getting at the truth. The backbone of an assortment of Home Office detectives who make up the Peculiar Crimes Unit, they are tasked with solving cases outside the purview of the normal authorities. When a young woman is found dead in the pews of a small church, of no apparent cause, it is a case that, on the face of it, belongs to the City of London Police. At the same time the head of Home Office security—and their old nemesis — Oskar Kasavian, asks the pair to investigate his (much younger) wife, who seems to be suffering from paranoid delusions. When the two cases seem to be linked, the duo pursue a trail of clues that lead to Bletchley Park, home of the code-breakers of World War Two. What follows is a quirky, engaging, and frequently outrageous tale that is classic Bryant and May.



Ten Lords A-Leaping
by C.C. Benison

If you guessed that *Ten Lords A-Leaping* is the third in a series, you'd be not far wrong. Canadian author C. C. Benison introduced his amateur sleuth, vicar Tom Christmas (yes, that's right, *Father Christmas*) in *Twelve Drummers Drumming*, followed last year by — you guessed it — *Eleven Pipers Piping*. In the chocolate-box village of Thornford Regis the locals are preparing for a fund-raising event marked by the sky-diving exploits of ten members of the aristocracy who lend their aerial services to various charitable causes. Not one with a head for heights, Tom Christmas finds himself pressed into service as an additional skydiver, much to his horror. His personal misgivings pale, however, when he witnesses mid-air fisticuffs between

two of the Lords, further aggravated by the fact that one of their parachutes fails to open properly. Although everyone lands safely, it is not long before one of the combatants is found dead, and the private machinations of the aristocratic family threaten to become very public. Not to be confused with Ruth Dudley Edward's crime novel of the same title, *Ten Lords A-Leaping* offers a delightful complement to the holiday season.



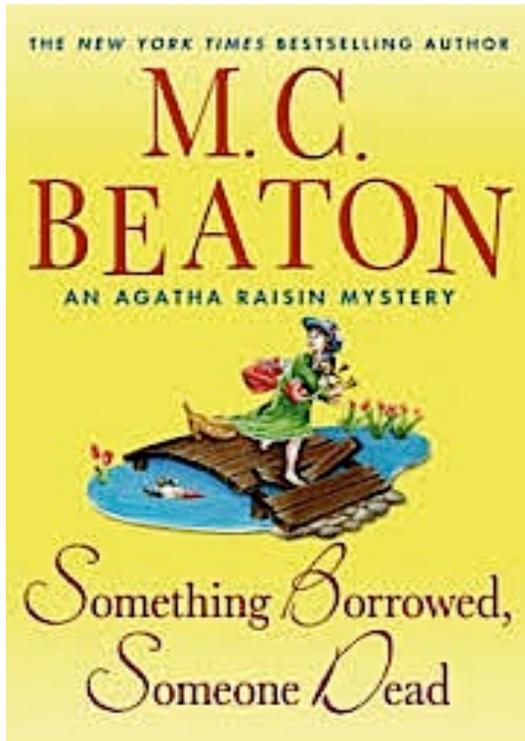
Never Laugh as the Hearse Goes By,
by Elizabeth J. Duncan

Elizabeth Duncan has justly inherited the mantle so capably worn for years by Rhys Bowen, as the spinner of crime fiction tales set in the delightful Welsh countryside, a land mercifully

untouched by the trammels of contemporary life. Or is it? Attending a conference at a famous country library, spa owner and amateur sleuth Penny Brannigan finds herself in the thick of things when the local Bishop's secretary succumbs to food poisoning. Was it a simply a tragic oversight in accommodating the victim's well-known allergies, or is something — and someone — more sinister at work? When another member of the conference is found dead in the library, the possibilities seem to be narrowing fast...

Something Borrowed, Someone Dead,
by M. C. Beaton

The 24th and latest in her popular Agatha Raisin series. When Gloria French moves to the Cotswold village of Piddlebury, everyone is please to have a new neighbor with a real spirit for volunteering in community events—at first. But before long she is known for a less admirable habit of borrowing things and not returning them. When she is found dead, a local Parish councillor concerned with the village's reputation, hires Agatha to track down her killer. It is a task not without its dangers. Always a pleasure to read, the series provides a nice complement to that "other" Agatha's series set in St. Mary's Mead, with a minimum of violence and an emphasis on the traditional whodunit.



Since 2005 Jim Napier's reviews and interviews have appeared in several Canadian newspapers and on such websites as *Spinetinger*, *The Rap Sheet*, *Shots Magazine*, *Crime Time*, *Reviewing The Evidence*, *January* magazine, and the *Montreal Review of Books*, as well as on his own award-winning site, *Deadly Diversions*. He can be reached at jnapier@deadlydiversions.com