

# Violence and valentines

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## *Suspended Sentences*

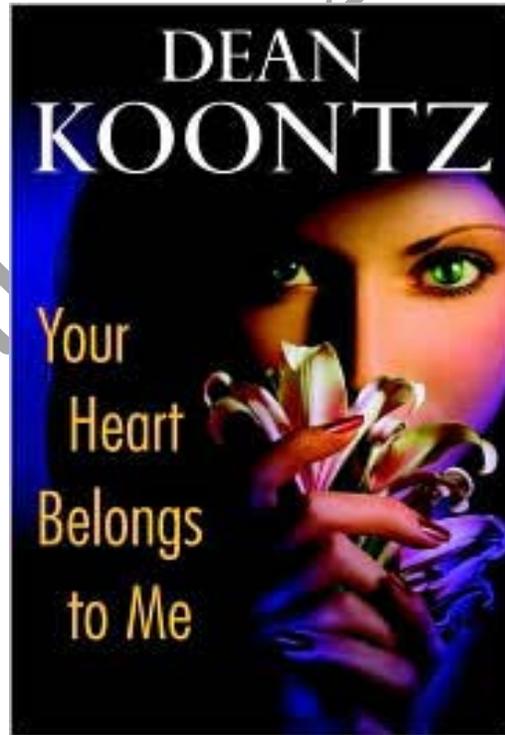
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by Jim Napier

Cupids and coroners. Perhaps not the most obvious combination, at first glance. Yet more than one crime writer—not least P.D. James—has said that love, not hate, is the most powerful human emotion, often leading to murder. On that note, this week I offer up a few murder mysteries which reminds us that on St. Valentine's Day Cupid will be shooting arrows. Although mostly cozies, there are a couple of thrillers thrown into the mix. Not all are current releases, but they are all readily available through the Internet, or better yet, through your local bookseller.

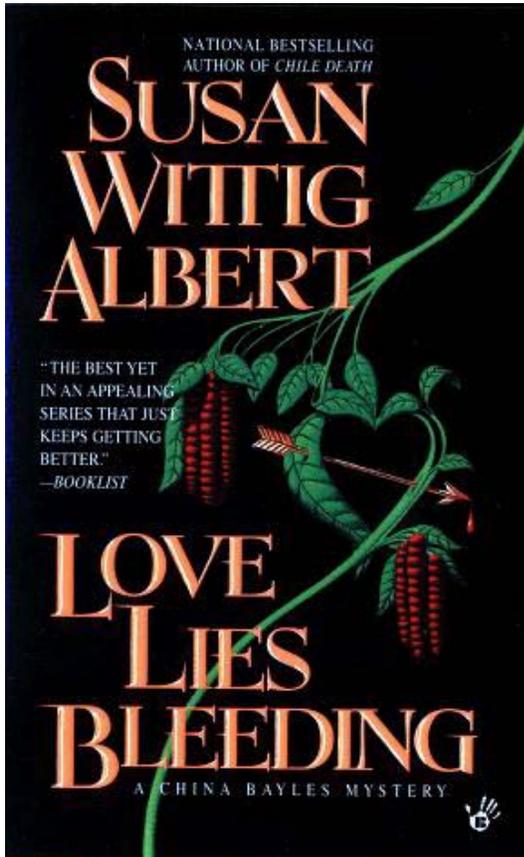
**Dean Koontz,**  
*Your Heart Belongs to Me,*  
(Bantam/Random House, 2008)

Successful dot-com businessman Ryan Perry is only thirty-four when he learns that he has a fatal heart problem, and is placed on a waiting list for a transplant.



Against the odds he finds one, and a year later his life seems to be getting back on track. That is, until anonymous gifts begin appear: a box of candy, a piece of jewelry shaped like a heart. When a video detailing heart surgery arrives, it is accompanied by a chilling note that says *Your heart belongs to me*. Ryan Perry has his very own stalker, and she is the spitting image of the donor who gave

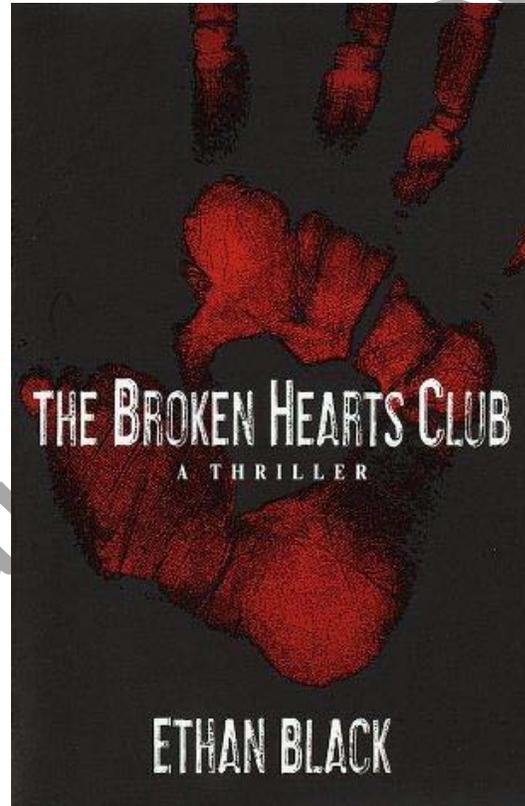
him a second life. A masterful tale from a bestselling author, with a plot for our times.



**Susan Wittig Albert,**  
*Love Lies Bleeding*  
(Berkley, 1998)

The sixth entry in Albert's immensely popular series featuring herbalist China Bayles, a former Houston-based trial lawyer who abandoned her career to find meaningful relationships and a quieter, rural life. Recently returned from a retreat at a monastery where she has been pondering her career, China Bayles tackles a mystery surrounding the death of a former Texas Ranger. The police have it down as a suicide, but when she discovers he was involved with a well-known drug lord, China begins to have her doubts. In the course of her investigation she will find herself in well

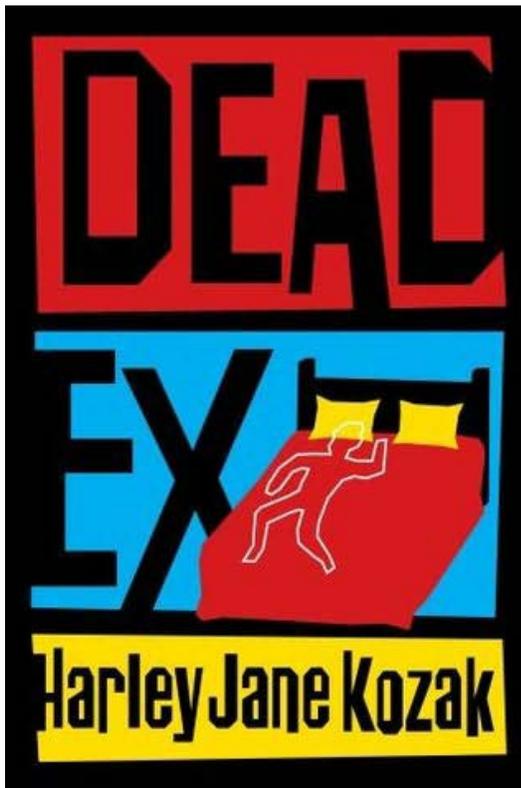
over her head, and matters are not simplified when she begins to have doubts about her relationship with longtime lover Mike McQuaid. Other books in the series (each has a herbal theme) include *Thyme of Death*, *Rosemary Remembered*, *Lavender Lies*, *Bleeding Hearts*, *A Dilly of a Death*, and *Bleeding Hearts*. What's not to like?



**Ethan Black,**  
*The Broken Hearts Club*  
(Ballantine, 1999)

A psychological thriller set in the Big Apple. Each Thursday a therapy group composed entirely of men meet with their psychologist at a local tavern to discuss their broken lives. The group includes a banker, a literary agent, and a garage mechanic, and each nurses a grudge against his ex-lover. Things take an ominous turn when the women in their former lives suddenly begin to die

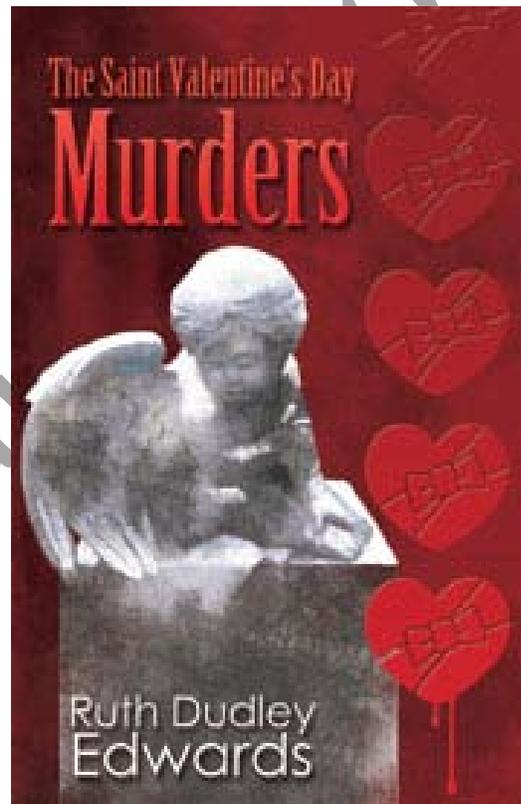
violent deaths. NYPD detective Conrad Voort finds himself looking into the case, and, as luck would have it, he's involved in a flawed relationship of his own. This fast-paced debut novel is full of twists and turns, and was the basis for a highly successful series. It will resonate with anyone who's ever been dumped, jilted, or in a flawed relationship, and who among us has been spared that fate?



**Harley Jane Kozak, *Dead Ex***  
(Doubleday, 2007)

A cautionary tale for our times. What to do when one of your ex-lovers is murdered, and another former lover seems to be the prime suspect? It's a problem faced by TV personality Wollie Shelley, as she takes on the death of prominent and well-liked soap opera producer David Zetrakis, who has been found shot to death. The amateur sleuth is determined to get to the bottom of the

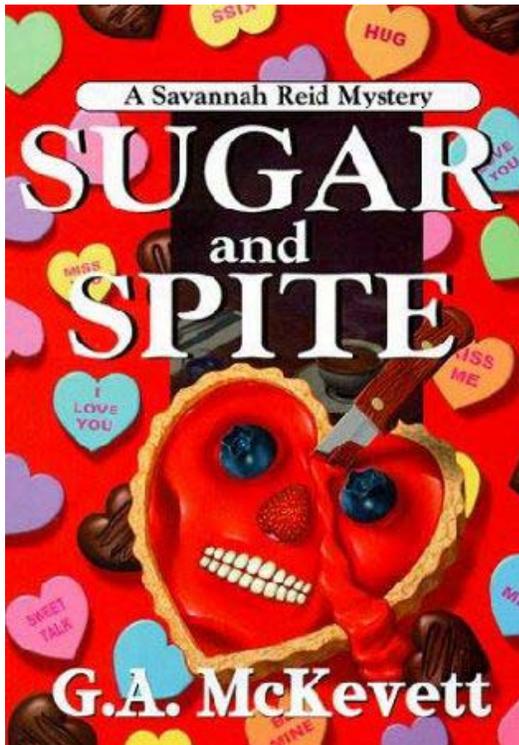
controversial soap-opera producer's death, and finds that the world of show business is no less dangerous than the world of serial dating. Meanwhile her own life is far from ordered as she struggles to define her relationship with her current (and ex-FBI-agent) boyfriend, and help her brother transition from a mental hospital to a halfway house. Who said life was simple? Wicked and funny, Kozak's first novel, *Dating Dead Men*, won multiple awards.



**Ruth Dudley Edwards,**  
***The St. Valentine's Day Murders***  
(Poisoned Pen Press, 2007)

Civil service bureaucrat Robert Amis is less than thrilled when he is assigned to manage a group of morose and moronic misfits in the inaptly-named British Conservation Corporation, a newly-created branch of government charged with making government more efficient.

His immediate superior's most outstanding quality is the ability to nap in his office, and his staff makes no effort to hide their hostility for this interloper in their comfortably-established lives. A series of practical jokes and screw-ups threaten to permanently stall his efforts to parlay his dead-end job into a more promising one when things take a more ominous turn: someone has sent boxes of strychnine-laced chocolates to each member of the department on St. Valentine's Day, with predictable results. When the local plod seems unequal to the task of finding the culprit, Amiss takes it on himself. A devilishly witty send-up of the British civil service by an acknowledged master of the contemporary satirical crime novel.



Perhaps best known as the author of the bestselling novel *Far and Away*, Sonja Massie has penned more than forty works, including under her pen name of G. A. McKevevett, a highly-successful series of “foodie” mysteries featuring California-based PI Savannah Reid. In this outing Savannah (more than vaguely reminiscent of Delta Burke in the TV series *Delta*) finds herself spending Valentine's Day on a stakeout with her ex-partner, Dirk Coulter. Only days later Dirk is arrested. It seems his two-timing ex-wife has turned up dead in his trailer, shot with his gun. Savannah realizes it will be an uphill battle to prove him innocent. A wide-ranging romp through the bizarre world of Southern California, with more than a few laughs along the way. Other books in the Savannah Reid series include *Corpse Suzette*, *Murder à la Mode*, *Cereal Killer*, *Death by Chocolate*, *Sour Grapes*, *Peaches and Screams*, *Killer Calories*, *Bitter Sweets*, and *Just Desserts*. Now doesn't that just get your mouth watering?

Oh, I almost forgot: Happy Valentine's Day!

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**G. A. McKevevett, *Sugar And Spite*  
(Kensington, 2001)**