

Cruel Yule

felonies for the festive season

Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

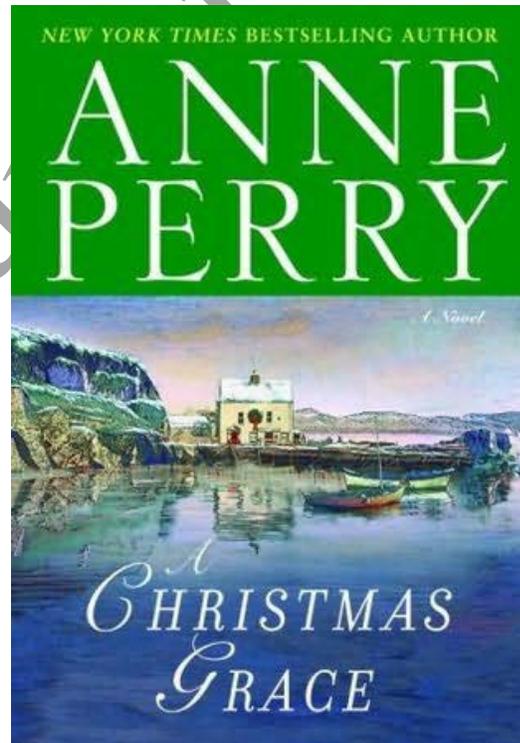
The season for giving is once again upon us, and what better gift than a few hours of carefully-honed terror? In a blatant attempt to counter the mindless seasonal cheer that results from watching the 47th television re-runs of *It's a Wonderful Life* and *Miracle on 34th Street*, I offer half a dozen titles designed to appeal to the dark side lurking in us all. Eschewing such obvious (albeit actual) titles as *Fleece Navidad*, *Wreck the Halls*, *Six Geese a-Slaying*, *Santa Clawed*, and *Hark the Herald Angel Screamed*, here are my personal picks for murderously fun reading during the holidays. As the song goes, make someone happy.

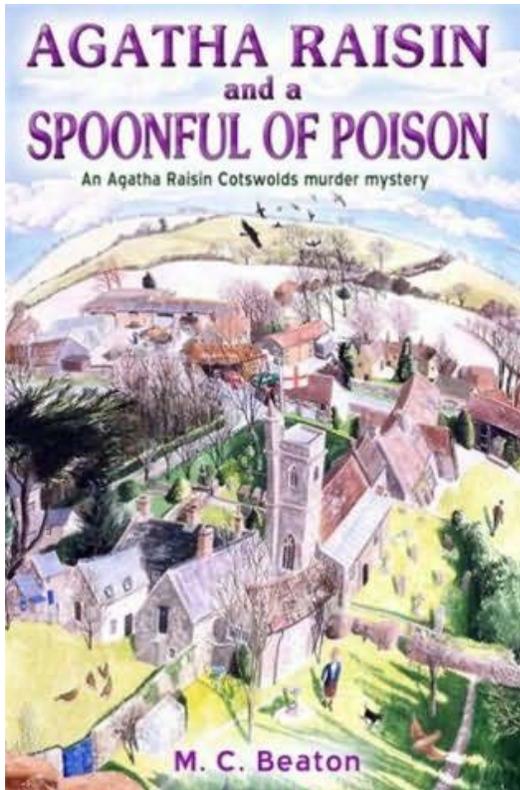
Anne Perry,
A Christmas Grace
(Ballantine Books, 2008)

Every yuletide for the past half-dozen years, bestselling British author Anne Perry has presented her fans with a novel especially tailored to the season. This year she's served up a Victorian mystery that combines hope with forgiveness in a tale rich with intrigue. When Emily Radley journeys from London to a small village on the barren coast of western Ireland to tend to her dying aunt, she learns that the community has been riven by the fear that a murderer lurks in their midst. To help heal the community and bring peace to her dying aunt, Emily

undertakes to solve the crime, and a lone survivor of a shipwreck holds the key.

Her skillful use of period detail, combined with a strong sense of place, lifts Anne Perry's novels to the very pinnacle of historical fiction. Not to be missed.





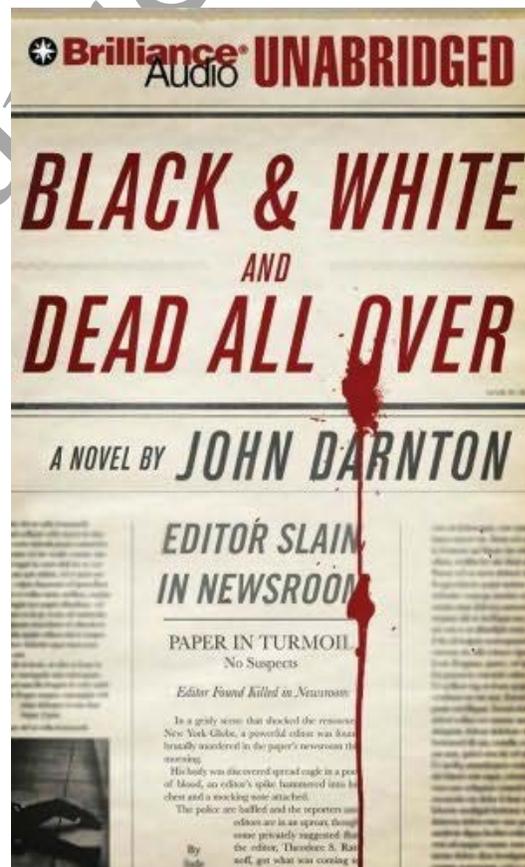
M. C. Beaton,
*Agatha Raisin and a Spoonful of
Poison*
(St. Martin's Minotaur, 2008)

Perhaps best known for her Hamish Macbeth novels dramatized for TV, Beaton has also penned an extensive series of tongue-in-cheek tales starring village sleuth Agatha Raisin. (One of my favourites is *Agatha Raisin and the Quiche of Death*.) In this, the 19th offering in the series, having been persuaded to organize a church fête, Agatha is understandably less than pleased to find that someone has tampered with the samples in the jam-tasting booth, with deadly consequences. She resolves to solve the crime, an undertaking that will require exposing some of the villagers' dirty little secrets. The resemblance to Miss Marple is not coincidental, but Agatha Raisin has a definite edge to her.

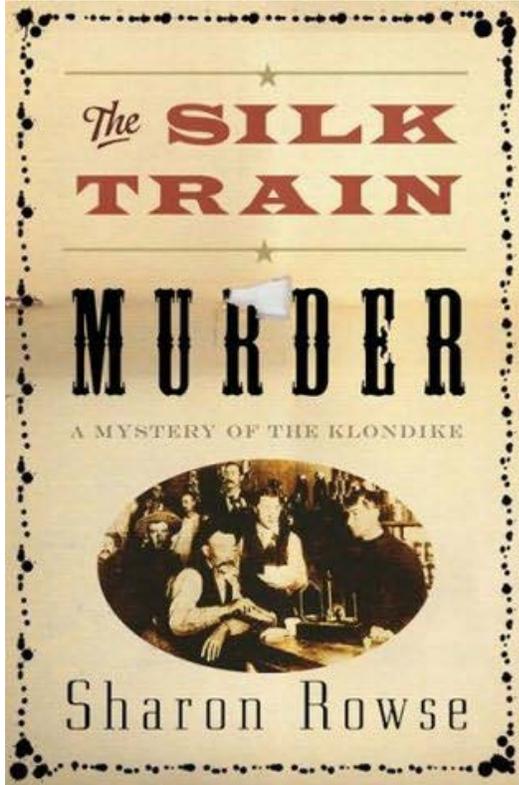
Witty, insightful, and cleverly plotted, Beaton's stories stand on their own. Read one and you'll want to read the rest.

John Darnton,
Black and White and Dead All Over
(Knopf, 2008)

The *New York Globe* is having its problems: circulation is dropping, advertisers are bailing, and management is actively seeking ways to cut costs. But these events pale into insignificance when an editor is found dead in the newsroom, the spike he'd used to kill stories thrust into his chest. There is no shortage of suspects for NYPD detective Priscilla Bollingsworth to consider, though some of them seem to be out of the running when they, too, turn up dead.



A fast-paced, satirical tale that captures the tensions of the newspaper world, written by a prize-winning journalist with over forty years of experience, *Black and White and Dead All Over* will resonate with journalists, but is an entertaining read for anyone.



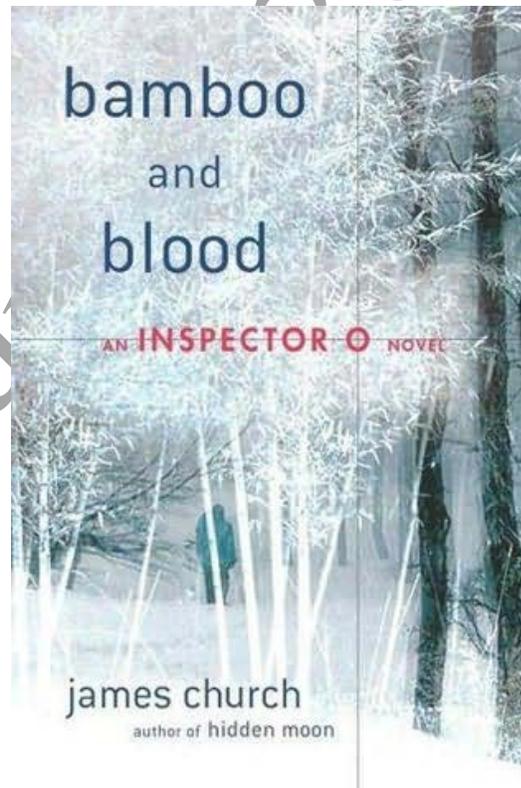
Sharon Rowse,
The Silk Train Murder
(Carroll and Graf, 2007)

Fiction based on fact. In the heyday of the Klondike Gold Rush there was a thriving business transporting silk from the orient to Vancouver by ship, and thence by specially-designed trains to New York. More valuable than gold, the silk trains quickly became magnets for thieves and murderers as they crossed the continent.

Shortly after taking a job guarding a silk train, gentleman-adventurer John Landsdowne Granville discovers it will be a challenging task. Successfully foiling a

sabotage attempt, he and his friend Sam Scott discover the body of a notorious gangster the very next day. When Scott is arrested for the murder he refuses to talk. But convinced he is innocent, Granville sets out to find the real culprit and clear his friend.

A nicely-paced tale of two adventurers poised on the cusp of a new era, when the rough-and-tumble of Victorian life on the frontier was giving way to the modern age, *The Silk Train Murder* is a captivating and original tale about a little-known part of Canadian history.



James Church,
Bamboo and Blood
(Thomas Dunne, 2008)

Who says it's all been done before? Author James Church gives readers a thriller about goings-on in North Korea, perhaps the most secretive nation in the world today. Inspector O is assigned to look into the suspicious death of the wife

of a North Korean diplomat in Pakistan, only not too closely. Navigating his way among the labyrinth of government ministries, before it is over the case will take him from Pyongyang to the streets of New York and on to the shores of Lake Geneva, as he discovers that someone has him in their crosshairs.

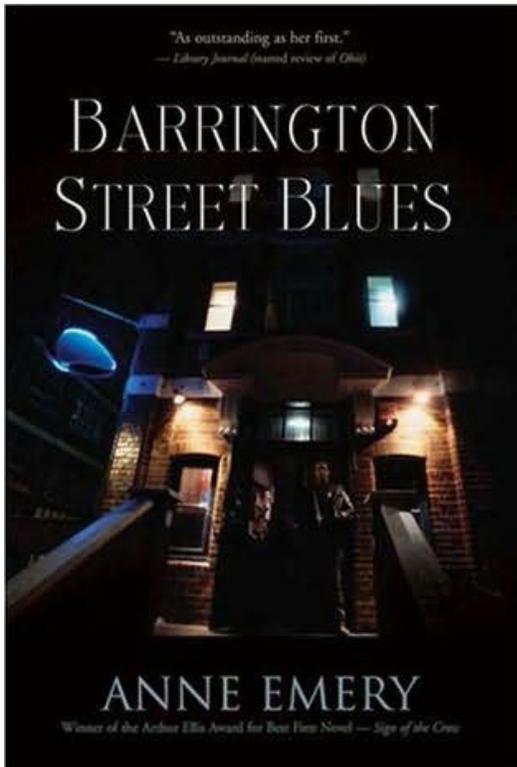
A fast-paced thriller from the pen of a former Western intelligence officer with decades of experience, *Bamboo and Blood* is the third in the Inspector O series, and will appeal to fans of David Baldacci and Richard North Patterson.

hired by the victim's families isn't so sure. Teaming up with a priest and his law partner Felicia Morgan, Collins' investigation takes him into the dark underbelly of the city in a search for the truth. It turns out that the placid exterior of Halifax masks a wide array of seamy secrets.

Emery combines a strong sense of place with a layered plot that holds your interest from the very first page. Deftly combining action and crackling dialogue, Anne Emery is an author to watch for.

So happy holidays to all, and remember, the colour red is not reserved only for Santa's suit...

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 **Anne Emery,**
Barrington Street Blues
(ECW Press, 2008)

Award-winning Canadian author Anne Emery is back, with a tale set in Halifax. When a rich man and a poor man are found shot to death outside a bar, the solution seems obvious: a murder-suicide. But Monty Collins, a lawyer