



Murder Under the Christmas Tree: Ten Classic Crime Stories for the Festive Season

*Cecily Gayford (Editor) , Arthur Conan Doyle , Dorothy L. Sayers , Ngaio Marsh , Agatha Christie ,
Margery Allingham , Ellis Peters*

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Murder most festive...

A locked room mystery solved with a flourish on Boxing Day.
Blackmail on Christmas Eve.
A missing jewel discovered in a very festive hiding place.
A body slumped in a chair on Christmas morning, still listening to carols.
The midnight theft of a gift intended for a saint.

Crime doesn't take a holiday, so these - and many more - are the puzzles that make up *Murder under the Christmas Tree*, a collection of festive mysteries featuring fictional sleuths from Lord Peter Wimsey to Sherlock Holmes, Cadfael to Father Brown. This is the very best of Christmas murder and mayhem - so settle into your armchair, put another log on the fire and take a bite of your mince pie. Just make sure it's not poisoned...

Murder Under the Christmas Tree: Ten Classic Crime Stories for the Festive Season Details

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From Reader Review Murder Under the Christmas Tree: Ten Classic Crime Stories for the Festive Season for online ebook

Donnah Brown says

An enjoyable mix of short stories to suit all tastes. I found a couple very spooky, there were some old fashioned tales, along side more modern mysteries. An eclectic assortment of characters, some odd, some wicked, some difficult, while others are definitely more likeable. Easy read, you can dip in and out of at leisure.

Pamela says

Charming collection of crime stories linked by a Christmas theme. The Golden Age favourites such as Marsh and Allingham are represented here, with famous characters such as Sherlock Holmes and Father Brown putting in an appearance. Modern authors Ian Rankin and Val McDermid also feature. Theft, murder, blackmail and espionage figure in the list of crimes so there really is something for everyone.

Easy and enjoyable read for the Christmas season.

Dee Gurganus says

I am not much on short stories, but what intrigued me about this book was the Christmas theme and the authors. The mysteries themselves were interesting and for the most part kept me guessing.

Lisa Kucharski says

Would rate this 3 1/2 if I could. I've read some of the stories before, but I do like them quite a bit. The one had hadn't read were good and a bit more contemporary but fit well with the older mysteries.

The book doesn't have the usual number of stories since they are all a bit longer than shorter- which also makes for a bit richer experience.

If you have a mystery lover who likes Xmas stories, this would be a good book to get. Also if they like both older and newer mysteries.

Katrina says

I found this one difficult to rate because some of the stories are a bit disappointing, including the one by Dorothy Sayers - but others are good.

Akylina says

Even though the lovely Kirsty and I initially planned to read this collection of festive short stories upon the beginning of December, due to essay deadlines and a very hectic schedule, I began reading this on the 14th of December instead, making it just in time for Christmas Eve by reading one story per day.

It is no secret that I adore mysteries and crime stories and I do admit to having a very soft spot for the classic, cosy ones, like Agatha Christie's or Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's. Upon acquiring this collection, I felt very excited for the stories included, as I was already familiar with some of the authors' names. As can be expected from a short story collection, though, not all stories were to my liking, and I did find myself enjoying more those classic ones rather than the more modern ones. My most favourite stories were the very first one, "The Necklace of Pearls" by Dorothy L. Sayers and "The Invisible Man" by C.K. Chesterton, while I thoroughly enjoyed "Cinders" by Ian Rankin and "The Name on the Window" by Edmund Crispin as well. "A Traditional Christmas" by Val McDermid, instead, was the most disappointing one for me. The very first line echoed Daphne DuMaurier's *Rebecca*, one of my most favourite books of all time, but sadly, there was no similarity to it whatsoever. While the revealing of the killer did surprise me, I did not find their motives all that convincing.

All in all, it was a wonderful collection to read during Christmas time and most of the stories managed to combine the chilly atmosphere of a good murder mystery with the festive mood of Christmas.

Karen says

An enjoyable collection of stories. My favourites were by Carter Dickson, Ellis Peters and Val McDermid.

Kirsty says

When Akylina and I met up in Edinburgh at the end of November, we decided to purchase two copies of *Murder Under the Christmas Tree* to read together. With essay deadlines and the like, our collaboration didn't quite go to plan, but I thought I'd post my review of the book regardless. I decided to open it on the first of December and read one of the ten stories per day, as a kind of constructive advent treat.

With regard to crime novels, cosy crime is definitely my favourite sub-genre; I adore authors such as Agatha Christie and Edmund Crispin, and will always seek them out over contemporary thrillers (much as I'll admit that I tend to enjoy these too, I'm generally not that surprised by the plot twists, as I feel that a lot of them follow the same - or at least very similar - guidelines). Whilst I had heard of a lot of the authors in this collection, there were a couple who were on my radar but whom I was not familiar with, and one (Carter Dickson) whom I hadn't even heard of before.

I feel that the best way in which to approach such a collection is to give a mini review of each tale. *Murder Under the Christmas Tree* begins with Dorothy L. Sayers' 'The Necklace of Pearls', a clever tale in which a very rich, and not very well liked, man named Septimus Shale's daughter has her precious pearl necklace stolen during a holiday gathering. Lord Peter Wimsey makes an appearance (of course), just happening as he does to be part of the festivities. The way in which Sayers writes is enjoyable, and she sets the scene perfectly throughout. The second story in the collection is Edmund Crispin's 'The Name on the Window', which I very much enjoyed. In this Boxing Day mystery, which centres upon his famous creation of Oxford

Don-cum-detective Gervase Fen, a recent murder is investigated. The locked-room variety of plot which has been used here is clever; not the best Fen story, but its workings and conclusion certainly suited the length of the piece.

Val McDermid's 'A Traditional Christmas' catapults one from past decades to the present, and its opening sentence was reminiscent to me of Daphne du Maurier's wonderful Rebecca: 'Last night, I dreamed I went to Amberley'. This is where our female narrator's wife was brought up in luxury. Again, the story deals with a murder. McDermid's prose style is rather matter-of-fact at points, but it has flashes of great humour within it, and any oddness which the tale holds is made up by the fact that it has been so well done. Next comes a classic, Arthur Conan Doyle's 'The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle'. I have read this before on numerous occasions, and still find it wonderfully clever. For those of you unfamiliar with this particular Sherlock Holmes story, a rare and precious stone - the blue carbuncle of the title - has been placed within a goose, and subsequently lost.

'The Invisible Man' by G.K. Chesterton and 'Cinders' by Ian Rankin both have merit. The tales are very different from one another, but the contrast provided by their placing in the collection is memorable. In the former, which provided my first taste of Chesterton's work, a spectre appears, and a mysterious note consequently shows itself upon the window of a shop in Camden Town. Chesterton's prose is rich, and stylistically rather original. This Father Brown story takes on many issues about the perils of the modern world, and is entertaining from start to finish. In Rankin's effort, the crux of the problem is immediately shown to the reader: 'The Fairy Godmother was dead'. At an Edinburgh pantomime, the body is found, and Rebus is sent to investigate. The manner of the murder is simple, yet it demonstrates Rankin's intelligence and clever plot twists, struck as she is by Cinderella's slipper: 'Not that it was a glass slipper. It was Perspex or something. And it wasn't the one from the performance. The production kept two spares.'

'Death on the Air' provided my first glimpse into Ngaio Marsh's work, and I very much enjoyed it. She immediately sets the scene, and I was reminded a little of Harry Potter: 'On the 25th of December at 7:30am our Septimus Tonks was found dead beside his wireless set'. His body is discovered by the under-housemaid, and the investigation comes about when it is found that he was not accidentally electrocuted as first thought. After Marsh's crafty tale, we come to 'Persons or Things Unknown' by Carter Dickson, which I must admit I didn't much enjoy. The new owner of an old house in Sussex is convinced that it is haunted; he then tells a story from the 1660s which supposedly happened on the site. Whilst Dickson's story marks a differentiation in the collection in some ways, I did not personally find it immediately interesting or engaging, and could have happily skipped past it. There was a curious distancing and framing here, and the monologue structure makes it rather dull and plodding.

Margery Allingham's 'The Case is Altered' picked up the pace once more; as a penultimate tale, it fits perfectly. This particular Campion tale is wonderfully crafted, from its initial sentence - 'Mr Albert Campion, sitting in a first-class smoking compartment, was just reflecting sadly that an atmosphere of stultifying decency could make even Christmas something of a stuffed-owl occasion, when a new hogskin suitcase of distinctive design hit him on the knees' - to its plot, in which his contemporary, Lance, receives an anonymous letter instructing him to wait in the grounds one night. True to form, Campion is immediately suspicious. This is one of the only stories in the collection which does not deal with a murder, and it feels refreshing in consequence. The final tale, Ellis Peters' 'The Price of Light', was a bit of a letdown in consequence. It does not feel overly grounded historically, despite the necessity of such a thing, being set in 1135 as it is. Whilst Peters' story was well written, I did not find it captivating by any means, and am of the opinion that it jarred the whole collection; it did not fit with anything else within *Murder Under the Christmas Tree*, aside from the general theme of murder.

To conclude, *Murder Under the Christmas Tree* would have been utterly fantastic had it consisted solely of festive Golden Age crime fiction. As it is, the book is enjoyable enough, but a couple of the entries do tend to make the whole feel a touch disjointed. Regardless, it has finally given me the push I needed to

incorporate Ngaio Marsh into my 2017 reading.

Iona Sharma says

I really enjoyed this, largely because the line-up is completely stellar: among others, it includes Ian Rankin, GK Chesterton, Dorothy L. Sayers, Ngaio Marsh, Val McDermid and Margery Allingham. The Chesterton story is a Father Brown story and delightfully unhinged - while it doesn't want to acknowledge it, it's steampunk SF as well a detective story - I also really liked the McDermid story, which has incidental queerness. Surprising no one, though, the best story in this collection is the Sherlock Holmes story we've all read a million times (the Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle), closely followed by an Ellis Peters Cadfael story, a beautiful short morality play.

Rosemary says

There's nothing really wrong with this book, the only reason I moved it into my Unfinished list is because it's now spring and I don't feel like reading wintery/Christmasy stories in warm months. I've thoroughly enjoyed the stories I've already finished, particularly the Sherlock Holmes one. And I look forward to the winter season again, snuggling with a hot chocolate, soft blanket and this book with the fireplace on...

Austra says

Galu gal? Š? gr?mata izv?rt?s lab?ka, nek? s?kum? š?ita. Jo pirmie p?ris st?sti bija tieš?m v?ji. Bet pamaz?m t? uz??ma arvien pat?kam?ku un interesant?ku tempu. Laba d?vana zem egl?tes (gan cit? gad?) k?dam, kas ciena krimi?us un st?stus.

Mark says

Another good read. This is a collection of short stories, all with an element of crime involved and all taking place around Christmas time. The settings vary, but could mostly be described as classic, given that most of the authors featured here come from the early 20th century. The most modern tale is a Rebus short story from Ian Rankin.

The settings invariably invoke a nostalgic feel for Christmas past - most of them are set in big country houses and feature a range of characters all gathering together for the Christmas festivities.

Most of the stories are short enough to be read in a spare half-hour or less.

On the whole, this is a good selection of classic crime tales and definitely one to be read to put you in a nostalgic, festive mood.

Theresa says

If there's one thing better than Christmas it's probably a lot of things, because at Christmas I have to spend all my money and work too many days without one off and also it's too hot. But one of the better things I guess

is Christmassy murders. Someone died, but *festively*. If you're going to die, you might as well ruin everyone else's Christmas on your way out I guess.

Jo Jenner says

A great collection of ten Christmas related murder mysteries. Some are very loosely linked to Christmas and others could only happen during the festivities. The tales move through the ages and through the great writers. Enjoy the tales of Lord Peter Wimsey, Brother Cadfael, Campion and Father Brown and come right up to date with a story from Val McDermid and even enjoy a trip to the panto with Inspector Rebus. I wouldn't recommend this for only old time of the year but definitely worth a read to get you in the Christmas spirit and perhaps give you some ideas as to how to make sure the relatives don't get too annoying. :)

Eleanor Lumar says

This is the third and final book I was given for Christmas, another collection of classic crime stories. It's similar to Murder On Christmas Eve, so I'm not going to write too much in this review. Out of the two, though, this is my favourite collection.

The stories in this collection are, for the most part, very good. The last couple weren't as engaging, but there's always going to be one or two you don't like. This collection even includes a tale about Sherlock Holmes (and Watson, of course) by Arthur Conan Doyle himself. It was actually the first I've read of his work, and it was definitely as fantastic as I'd hoped.

Like the other book, the ten stories vary from missing jewels hidden inside geese, to missing candle sticks, to death-by-radio. They're all very interesting mysteries, again seemingly simple on the surface but always a lot more intricate than they seem.

A nice collection of classic "festive" crimes. 3.5 stars.
