



Silent Nights: Christmas Mysteries

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Christmas is a mysterious, as well as magical, time of year. Strange things can happen, and this helps to explain the hallowed tradition of telling ghost stories around the fireside as the year draws to a close. Christmas tales of crime and detection have a similar appeal. When television becomes tiresome, and party games pall, the prospect of curling up in the warm with a good mystery is enticing - and much better for the digestion than yet another helping of plum pudding. Crime writers are just as susceptible as readers to the countless attractions of Christmas.

Over the years, many distinguished practitioners of the genre have given one or more of their stories a Yuletide setting. The most memorable Christmas mysteries blend a lively storyline with an atmospheric evocation of the season. Getting the mixture right is much harder than it looks. This book introduces readers to some of the finest Christmas detective stories of the past.

Martin Edwards' selection blends festive pieces from much-loved authors with one or two stories which are likely to be unfamiliar even to diehard mystery fans. The result is a collection of crime fiction to savour, whatever the season.

Silent Nights: Christmas Mysteries Details

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From Reader Review Silent Nights: Christmas Mysteries for online ebook

Lori says

This is a collection of mysteries with Christmas settings.

"The Blue Carbuncle" by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle - A stolen jewel is found in a goose. Sherlock Holmes finds the thief in this tale ending with an unexpected twist (unless you've read the story before which I had).

"Parlour Tricks" by Ralph Plummer - A robber is revealed through some amusements.

"A Happy Solution" by Raymond Allen - A thousand pound note intended for the Red Cross ends up in an envelope addressed to Kenneth Dale. Dale solves the case.

"The Flying Stars" by G. K. Chesterton - A jewel thief steals three valuable jewels while staging a comedic act.

"Stuffing" by Edgar Wallace - A robbery is discovered at Carfane Hall. Some aspects reminded me of "The Blue Carbuncle."

"The Unknown Murderer" by H. C. Bailey - A series of murders and attempted murders begins at a children's party. Dr. Fortune investigates.

"The Absconding Treasurer" by J. Jefferson Farjeon - Someone, possibly the treasurer, took money intended for distribution between several persons. Detective Crook investigates.

"The Necklace of Pearls" by Dorothy L. Sayers - A string of pearls goes missing during parlour games at which Lord Peter Wimsey is present.

"The Case Is Altered" by Margery Allingham - Invited to spend Christmas at Philip Cookham's home, Albert Campion's suspicious are aroused by the guests' activities, uncovering a blackmail plot.

"Waxworks" by Ethel Lina White - A reporter spends a night in a haunted wax museum to write a story.

"Cambric Tea" by Marjorie Bowen - Dr. Bevis Holroyd is summoned to the Strangeways household where a dying man accuses his wife of poisoning him.

"The Chinese Apple" by Joseph Shearing - Isabelle Crosland is tired after traveling from Florence to London. She'd agreed to meet her niece at the family home to take her back to Italy. The police question her about a murdered neighbor, warning her the murderer may be in disguise.

"A Problem in White" by Nicholas Blake - Arthur Kilmington travels on a train which previously was robbed. He ends up dead after the train is detained by weather. The reader must determine who was arrested for the murder.

"The Name on the Window" by Edmund Crispin - A locked room puzzle that isn't a locked room puzzle.

"Beef for Christmas" by Leo Bruce - A rich man invites retired Sergeant Beef to his home at Christmas. The man claims his relatives want him to quit his lavish spending so there will be an inheritance, implying they might resort to murder to ensure one remains.

As with most collections, some stories are stronger than others. This collection is stronger than most, and Edwards deserves commendation for his selections. I admit I preferred the murder mysteries to the thefts. The introductory material, providing brief biographies of the authors as well as an introductions to the stories, needed to be formatted differently, providing a more noticeable difference between it and the actual story text.

Kristin says

I am loving these British Library Crime Classic series being published by Poisoned Pen Press here in the U.S. This book of short story mysteries is like a box of chocolate as each one is as yummy as the rest. Of course, some people don't like nuts or cream-filled, but still, the majority are fun to read.

Catie says

Favorite Short Stories:

- The Blue Carbuncle by Arthur Conan Doyle
- The Necklace of Pearls by Dorothy L. Sayers
- The Case Is Altered by Margery Allingham
- Waxworks by Ethel Lina White
- Cambridge Tea by Marjorie Bowen

Lou Robinson says

This a rare event for me...5* for a collection of short stories. There wasn't a bad one amongst them, and I do love to read Christmas stories over the Christmas holidays. Lots of snow, lots of villains...and all in that fabulous Agatha Christie style. Great.

Sue says

I've enjoyed Martin Edwards' Lake District Mystery series for a while now and I have also followed his blog where he discusses his enjoyment of classic mysteries. Well I can see that he has put that enjoyment to very good use. In these fifteen stories, chosen for their Christmas season setting, Edwards has created a collection of Golden Age mystery stories by authors both familiar and unknown. They vary in setting from the country estate on Christmas to the city home during a winter storm or a railway journey at the holidays. There are all sorts of detectives. Some you may recognize. More, you likely will not.

I found this collection completely engaging, with no real misses. Among my favorites: Conan Doyle's Blue Carbuncle, Stuffing by Edgar Wallace, Sayers' The Necklace of Pearls, The Case is Altered by Margery Allingham (I have decided I must read more of her ASAP), Waxworks by Ethel Lina White, and Cambric Tea by Marjorie Bowen. (I also like the one written under one of her pseudonyms.) I could add more, but then it would be almost the entire collection!

I recommend this for a cold winter's day (or evening), with a nice hot cup of tea or cocoa (checking for signs of poison first, of course) and then just read and enjoy.

A copy of this book was provided by the publisher through NetGalley in return for an honest review.

BrokenTune says

3.5*

Like any collection of short stories, this one is a mixed bag. Martin Edwards is, of course, an expert in the stories and authors selected here, but as with his other selections, and indeed any other selection, his tastes and favourites are somewhat different to mine.

And, let's not forget that some authors are better at writing short stories than others. The authors selected for this collection seem to represent some of the big names of mystery writing, but not necessarily the ones who were good at shorts.

The Blue Carbuncle (Arthur Conan Doyle) - 5*

One of my all-time favourites.

Parlour Tricks (Ralph Plummer) - 3*

Quick and fun but not difficult to solve.

A Happy Solution (Raymond Allen) - 2.5*

Convoluted.

The Flying Stars (G.K. Chesterton) - 3.5*

Ah, Father Brown, you observer of human frailty. Far superior to old biddy Marple but quite quaint ... unless you happen to catch the BBC tv series or the 1960s German adaptation.

Stuffing (Edgar Wallace) - 4*

Typical Wallace humour, I'd say.

The Unknown Murderer (H.C. Bailey) - 3.5*

Dark and unsettlingly evil.

The Absconding Treasurer (J. Jefferson Farjeon) - 2*

This one just felt like a rushed listing of plot points and character names.

The Necklace of Pearls (Dorothy L. Sayers) - 4*

A fun Christmas country house jewel theft story.

The Case if Altered (Margery Allingham) - 3.5*

A fun Christmas country house espionage story.

Waxworks (Ethel Lina White) - 4.5*

Waxworks turned out to be brilliant, tho probably better at home in a horror collection.

Cambric Tea (Marjorie Bowen) - 2.5*

Meh. Great concept but too drawn out. I guess, the length meant to give time for the suspicions to develop and linger, but it didn't quite work for me. Also, I had predicted the ending rather early on.

The Chinese Apple (Joseph Shearing) - 2*

This one just did not grab me at all. In fact, I had to read several paragraphs two or three times, and still managed to fall asleep.

A Problem in White (Nicholas Blake) - 2.5*

I should have enjoyed this one more than I did - we had a number of clues to solve the puzzle and I loved the setting: starting on a train and with a background story of a great train robbery. (And I actually had to imagine P.D. with the voice of Sean Connery - until he said he was "English on the outside, Scotch on the inside" ...).

However, this one struck me as one where the author wanted to let us know how incredibly clever he is, and that dampened my enjoyment.

The Name on the Window (Edmund Crispin) - 3*

This was an interesting one, but then I do love a locked room mystery.

Beef for Christmas (Leo Bruce) - 3*

Much like The Name on the Window, this one was fun, even tho it bears a remarkable resemblance to a certain story featuring a certain Belgian gent.

Ruth says

This is a wonderful collection of Golden Age detective stories all set around the festive Christmas season. Martin Edward's Introduction whets the appetite for what's to come and each story is introduced with a useful couple of paragraphs which put the stories in context and give some basic information about each author.

Because it's an anthology of different authors you never know what's coming next and the styles are so varied. I really appreciated the opportunity to sample a range of different styles of writing, and try several authors I hadn't come across before. I will certainly be checking out the books of J. Jefferson Farjeon, H. C. Bailey and Leo Bruce.

Thank-you to NetGalley and Poison Pen Press for providing this book for review

John Frankham says

This volume in the British Library Crime Classics series is really very, very good.

Fifteen 20-ish crimes at Christmas, by a range of top-rate golden-age writers. authors who could write, as well as plot.

From Conan Doyle, GK Chesterton, Edgar Wallace, Dorothy Sayers, Margery Allingham, Marjorie Bowen (one of Britain's greatest 20thC authors), Nicholas Blake, and Edmund Crispin.

Cathy Cole says

Silent Nights is a collection of short stories written by some of the top mystery writers of the Golden Age. Some of the authors will be familiar to you, others won't. Although they're all set during the Christmas season, there is very little holiday spirit to be found in them, so don't pick this book up expecting to make merry.

Most of the mysteries seem to involve some sort of puzzle, and country house settings are found in quite a few. (Of course-- everyone goes to their country house for Christmas, don't they?) Editor Martin Edwards' introduction to the book and his individual introductions to each short story are interesting and informative, so I suggest that you don't skip them. One of the interesting tidbits I learned was that several authors represented in this volume wrote stories Alfred Hitchcock later made into films.

Having already read another British Library Crime Classic, *Resorting to Murder*, I knew what to expect. Many of the authors are no longer well known, but others-- like G.K. Chesterton and Dorothy L. Sayers-- are included here. On the whole I enjoyed *Silent Nights* more, although the quality of the stories is still a bit uneven. My favorites include Edgar Wallace's "Stuffing," J. Jefferson Farjeon's "The Absconding Treasurer," Sayer's "The Necklace of Pearls," Ethel Lina White's "Waxworks," Marjorie Bowen's "Cambric Tea," and "The Chinese Apple" by Joseph Shearing (nom de plume of Marjorie Bowen). Of these, Farjeon's and White's stories were used by Hitchcock. "A Problem in White" by Nicholas Blake (pseudonym of Cecil Day-Lewis) was unique in the puzzle category. The solution is not included in the story itself, but at the end of the book, giving readers time to mull over the clues and form their own conclusions.

If you're a fan of Golden Age mysteries, you're still going to find a new-to-you story or two. If you're a novice like I am, they'll probably all be totally unfamiliar. Since these were written many decades ago when outlooks were quite different, you will run into a racial slur now and again. I chose not to be offended and instead was pleased at how attitudes have changed. I also found it interesting to see how popular crime fiction has changed over time.

These British Library Crime Classics being released in the U.S. by Poisoned Pen Press are both entertaining and enlightening, and I recommend them.

Becky says

This review does not include the first Holmes story because it is much more famous and better than the other stories in the book.

I am glad I finished this book - although the book definitely had that Christmas atmosphere, the first half was bad and silly, the second half was much better but not excellent. Recommended stories include: "The Chinese Apple" and "The Name on the Window".

Ivonne Rovira says

Invariably, an anthology of Golden Age mystery short stories is bound to be uneven; however, Martin Edwards, an English solicitor and a mystery writer in his own right, has compiled a mostly delightful batch of Christmas-themed British mysteries in *Silent Night*.

For the most part, the collection contains undeservedly forgotten authors as well as lesser-known works by well-known authors interspersed with "The Blue Carbuncle" by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Case Is Altered" by Margery Allingham, and "The Flying Stars" by G.K. Chesterton. H.C. Bailey's amateurish "The Unknown Murderer" was the exception in an otherwise excellent collection. I want to particularly note the excellent "Waxworks" by Ethel Lina White, with whom I was unfamiliar until *Silent Night*.

The collection contains my own beloved, sadly forgotten favorite, J. Jefferson Farjeon, of whom I cannot get enough. As far as I'm concerned the price would be worth it just to get Farjeon's "The Absconding Treasurer," but all readers will find lots to love as they while away the dreary days after Christmas — or take a break from the hectic days leading up to the holidays — with *Silent Night*.

In the interest of full disclosure, I received this book from NetGalley and Poisoned Pen Press in exchange for an honest review.

Laila (BigReadingLife) says

As most short story collections are, I felt this was uneven. Four stories, especially Ethel Lina White's "Waxworks," were terrific. For those alone, this would be worth seeking out if you're a Golden Age mystery fan and want some reading specifically for the Christmas season. I'm glad I finally managed to read one of these British Library Crime Classics! I will certainly try another one.

Shiloah says

There's nothing like tales of yuletide criminology. This was an excellent collection. I thoroughly enjoyed this one.

Susan Johnson says

This is a wonderful anthology of short, delightful, Golden Age Christmas stories, mostly mysteries, put out by the British Library Crime Classics. There are stories by well known authors such as Sir Arthur Conan

Doyle, Dorothy Sayers and Edmund Crispin and then some lesser known, but quite talented, writers.

Each author has a little biography about them in front of their story which really adds something special. I liked the stories and they have stood the test the test of time.

So as Christmas season gets busy, take a little break and read a delightful short story that is sure to raise your Christmas cheer.

Lindsay says

To use a Christmas analogy, this book is like a half eaten tub of Quality Street - there's a few green triangles and a couple of purple ones, but what you've mostly got is the toffee pennies and strawberry cremes that nobody really likes, even when they've had a few too many port and lemons! Ethel Lena White's story was the standout for me, and of course Dorothy L Sayers and Margery Allingham were good, along with a few others but there was a lot of filler. Always the risk with a book of short stories though.
