



The Sirens Sang of Murder

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Young barrister Michael Cantrip has skipped off to the Channel Islands to take on a tax-law case that's worth a fortune -- if Cantrip's tax-planning cronies can locate the missing heir. But Cantrip has waded in way over his head. Strange things are happening on these mysterious, isolated isles. Something is going bump in the night -- and bumping off members of the legal team, one by one. Soon Cantrip is telexing the gang at the home office for help. And it's up to amateur investigator Hilary Tamar (Oxford don turned supersleuth) to get Cantrip back to the safety of his chambers -- alive!

The Sirens Sang of Murder Details

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From Reader Review The Sirens Sang of Murder for online ebook

Kristen says

Another superbly entertaining entry in this series. The Sirens Sang of Murder features more great European locations (the Channel Islands, France, Monte Carlo) and more delightful language. Caudwell's narrator, Hilary Tamar, has a voice that's nothing like real life, but infinitely more funny and charming. Here's one example:

"The accompanying photograph, it is fair to say, showed Julia to some advantage, through emphasizing, to an extent Ragwort would have frowned on, the decolletage previously mentioned. It showed Roland Devereux, on the other hand, at one of those moments when even the most photogenic of actors can hardly appear at his best, that is to say when a military gentleman of advanced years is emptying a plate of spaghetti over him."

Sadie Slater says

The third of Sarah Caudwell's Hilary Tamar mysteries sees Hilary drawn into investigating mysterious goings-on around a Jersey trust fund. As with the earlier books, it's almost an epistolary novel for about the first two-thirds, as Hilary and their friends from the 62 New Square chambers read and discuss correspondence from Cantrip, who is on the scene as advisor to the trust's meeting and is taking advantage of his hotel's telex facilities to send long, chatty accounts of the proceedings. Cantrip's narrative is delightfully Bertie Wooster-ish, while Hilary's parts of the novel continue to be a perfect rendition of the slightly pompous Oxford don (why yes, I do know whereof I speak...). As always, the action is split between Lincoln's Inn and the nearby wine bar the Corkscrew and several rather more exotic locations, in this case the Channel Islands, the Cayman Islands, France and Monte Carlo, and I do find that the sunny settings, along with the wit and general frothiness, make these particularly good books to read in a dull English winter. (I recollect that I liked *The Shortest Way to Hades* less than the other two, but on reflection that may be because I read it in September while I was on holiday, and I suspect that the sunniness of the books makes them work best when read when it's dark out and the prospect of the next holiday is a distant one.)

Miriam says

On the subject of the pen Julia became indignant. She had never heard of such a thing -- or at any rate she had never read of such a thing -- or at any rate not in any piece of respectable crime fiction published since the beginning of the Second World War. A physical object, forsooth, with the initials of the suspect engraved on it -- why, it was worse than a fingerprint.

...If the progress of the past half century was to count for nothing, then one might as well go back, said Julia scathingly, to murders committed by means of arsenic or for motives of matrimonial jealousy.

"I do not doubt,: I said, "that in a crime novel having any pretensions of modernity, the pen would be quite inadmissible. As a mere historian, however, there is nothing I can do about it.

Nature, as we know, does imitate Art, but I fear that she often falls short of the highest standards. Were you to turn your attention from fictional crimes to those reported in the newspapers, you would find that people are still leaving fingerprints and murdering unfaithful spouses for all the world as if they were living in the 1920s. In the more backward parts of the country they may even still be poisoning one another with arsenic. We cannot ignore the pen for the sake of literary fashion."

If you don't enjoy that passage, then this mystery is not for you. You should instead go search out a novel like the one Julia and Cantrip are collaborating on, where the suave, handsome Carruthers saves the shrinking damsel from unwanted advances and clasps her to his manly chest.

Moira Fogarty says

The third installment in Sarah Caudwell's Lincoln's Inn series featuring Professor Hilary Tamar is a cut above its predecessor. Once again, the reader will have a difficult time with the dry and cumbersome establishing chapters at the start of the book which discuss English tax law in vivid detail (tax was Caudwell's area of legal speciality), but once you've passed page 75 all that is behind you - ahead lies sex, murder, intrigue and the Channel Islands.

Cantrip starts the story with his Cambridge idiom turned on full blast, but as his telex messages grow longer, he settles into a proper Bertie Wooster impression that would do Wodehouse proud. His uncle Colonel Cantrip is a solid addition to the cast; adding levity, zest, and a marvelously casual approach to violence and the laws of Queen and country. I also enjoyed the sketches of the Contessa, Mr. Justice Welliboots, the quiet Liliane, and the rest of the Daffodil consortium.

The Sark island setting was wonderful as a backdrop for intrigue and seduction, with its brutal coastline, history of witchcraft and WWII encampments, and convenient Coupee to create an extra sense of isolation when a member of the group unexpectedly meets his maker one dark and stormy night. Great backdrop. The device of Cantrip being clueless about his whereabouts in the French countryside, and having poor envious Ragwort stuck in London decoding his location, being harassed by his uncle, and taking on his caseload while he is in absentia, worked to shine light on the race from Sark to Monte Carlo, and to add comic effect.

The book-within-a-book being penned by Julia and Michael also serves to enhance the author's dry, ironic wit as Cantrip finds himself repeatedly facing situations which he frames in respect of what they ought not to do when penning adventures for their own barrister hero.

Lots of meta-moments in this narrative, particularly Julia and Hilary's exchange about the too-obvious evidence of the Contessa's pen, discovered at the scene of a crime, and its absurdity in a contemporary fictional context.

Costumes and gender confusion are themes that get played on in all of Caudwell's texts (she cross-dressed and smoked a pipe during her own adventures as a woman pioneering at the Oxford Debate Club and at the Bar in the male-dominated legal and banking sectors of 1960s London), making this a delightful, playful read with moments of James Bond-ish (or rather, Carruthers-ish) suavity, last minute rescues, dastardly schemes, lost heiresses, and even a Nazi or two.

Brilliant summer holiday reading for the intellectual with a sense of humour.

Nancy says

Love the language.

Jamie Collins says

Nothing is certain except death and taxes, and this book has them both. The junior barristers of Lincoln's Inn become involved with a group of tax planners who are trying to locate the heirs to a trust fund. There's a complicated scheme concerned with tax avoidance, and much of the action takes place in the famous tax havens of the Channel Islands, the Cayman Islands and Monaco.

This was an amusing read, but I think it's the weakest of the three books so far. The plot involves numerous coincidences, and I never did quite understand the intricacies of the trust arrangement.

As usual, Julia's character is the most fun. It begins with her indignant reaction to the judge who disapproved of her client, who as "an innocent property developer, had entered into a perfectly straightforward transaction which happened to involve a bank in Amsterdam and one or two companies in the Netherlands Antilles and which therefore happened to result in his having no tax to pay." The judge, on the other hand, seemed to consider it "the duty of every citizen to arrange his affairs in such a way as to maximise his liabilities to the Inland Revenue, and of his professional advisors to assist him in achieving that result."

Like the first two books this one is partially epistolary, with letters arriving from Cantrip via the office's brand new Telex machine, a device which is providing Cantrip a great deal of amusement.

Meredith Holley says

Another stupendous installment of the madcap adventures of the gang at 62 and 63 New Square! This time, the mystery has the same background story as John Grisham's *The Firm*, but it is deeeelightful, instead of being kind of dark and boring. Again, what I find wonderful about all of Caudwell's books is that the unraveling of the stories are so light and fun, but the denouement always has a sense of insight into the depth of misunderstanding and tragedy of which humans are capable. These characters resonate with me, and I love them whether they are slipping on banana peels or prying into the heart and mind of a murderer.

I listened to this one on audio, and I must use the word "splendid" about the audio because it was so British in its greatness. I highly recommend it. This one has more Cantrip than some of the others, which I loved because I think Cantrip is a hilarious character. There is a joke at the beginning about how he learns to use the telex machine (I know, quaint! I am still not positive what a telex machine is, but it seems like sounds kind of like a cross between email and fax), and he suddenly has to send telexes to everyone he can find a number for. He's, like, one of the original trolls. Brilliant. I love all the lawyers, though. Julia's wonderful tax planning advice is great, and Selena's advocacy, and Ragwort's disapproval of it all. Why do people read stupid Grisham and Ludlum and the like? Sorry, fans, but I cannot abide those people and their boring redundancy. Caudwell kicks their asses.

I guess she does basically hit everything I love in every book: law, literature, gender, slapstick, melodrama. Really the only thing missing is the characters bursting out into a Whedon-esque song and dance. Otherwise,

it's all in there. And she doesn't really repeat on the sex and gender stuff, either. It seems different and new in every book. I'm going to copy for you this really wonderful exchange that Caudwell uses with artistry that I think is genius in this book:

"There is nothing to worry about," said Julia, with an excess of confidence which I found in itself alarming. "I have worked out a strategy for dealing with him. I intend to model my behaviour in all respects on that of my Aunt Regina. My Aunt Regina, so far as I can discover, doesn't believe that men progress much morally or intellectually after the age of six, and she treats them accordingly. She always gets on splendidly with men like the Colonel – two of her husbands were of just the same type."

"My dear Julia," said Ragwort, "your ambition to deal with men in the same manner as your Aunt Regina is very laudable. From the point of view of realism, however, it is somewhat similar to your deciding to play tennis in the style of Miss Martina Navratilova."

"The trouble is," said Selena, with a certain wistfulness, "that you and I, Julia, have been brought up in an era of emancipation and enlightenment, and we have got into the habit of treating men as if they were normal, responsible, grown-up people. We engage them in discussion; we treat their opinions as worthy of quite serious consideration; we seek to influence their behavior by rational argument rather than by some simple system of rewards and punishments. It's all a great mistake, of course, and only makes them confused and miserable – especially men like the Colonel, who have grown up with the idea that women will tell them what they ought to do without their having to think about it for themselves. But I'm afraid it's too late to put the clock back."

Incidentally, if you listen to the audio of these books, you realize that Julia's Aunt Regina's name rhymes with vagina. . . . So, that was a pleasant surprise. Last night, inspired by this book and the Oregon legal community, I spent some delightful hours with friends talking about the potential of someone named Regina Sarcombe sizing us up.

Anyway, I love the way this book both lightheartedly and tragically shows relationships between men and women. It shows how people are very silly and very passionate, in just the way I see people as silly and passionate. I read something on wikipedia about the series - that it suffers from being too detached, or something? I agree that there is a beautifully British ironical detachment in the right places, but where the stories should be compassionate and touching, they are that as well. These are wonderful books, and I'm a little sad that I gave the first two to a friend. I will have to find new copies so that I can have a complete set. Oh, but it looks like there are some very tempting hardcovers out there. I resolve that I shall wait until I get paid, but after that there are no guaranties that my hardcover collection won't get a little fatter.

Ram Kaushik says

A truly unique writer and one to be savored. Ms. Caudwell has a mischievous sense of humor and a marvelous way with prose.

For those who enjoy old fashioned English writing with the philosophy "why use 5 words when 50 long-winded ones are so much better." this book will be hugely enjoyable. For those who prefer American style direct and concise writing, stick with Hemingway.

Beth says

“Yes,” said Julia. “So the impasse—which I take to be the correct expression for a situation in which no one makes a pass at anyone—continued throughout my stay . . . except that on the way back to our hotel I tripped over something, and Patrick took my arm to prevent me falling over. This had a very peculiar effect on me, even worse than the breathlessness and indigestion which I have previously mentioned—I felt as if suppose an ice cream might feel when hot chocolate sauce is poured over it.” p. 68

The trouble with real life is that you don't know whether you're the hero or just some nice chap who gets bumped off in chapter five to show what a rotter the villain is without anyone minding too much. p. 171

Unfortunately, Good Reads doesn't have Cauldwell's fourth book, *The Sybil in Her Grave*, so I'll have to state with sob-laden gasps that this is the last book Cauldwell wrote and the erudite, ironic, and oh-so-full-of-him/herself Hilary will solve no more murders.

Bill says

A bit slow to start, unless you are fascinated by the intricacies of British inheritance law, but eventually an enjoyable mystery. The humor is very dry and British (lots of subtle digs at Cambridge by the Oxford-educated narrator). I'm a little surprised these haven't been done on TV by Masterpiece.

Bettie? says

Bettie's Books

Megan says

While not my favorite of the series, this book does just what you'd want out of a "Cantrip gets into trouble; surprisingly, not all of it is his fault!" premise. Yes, there are plenty international tax law details, too, and I quite enjoyed the finesse with which Caudwell lays out her mysteries and constructs clues and shadows, but the character stuff was all sorts of perfect. Julia and Cantrip are writing a novel starring not-even-thinly-veiled Mary Sues of themselves! Selena and Ragwort offer politely dueling interpretations of one of Julia's previous love affairs! (Julia herself, being perfectly and wonderfully Julia, can see both sides, or more, to it.) The characters are smart and funny and witty, and there's still a lot of heart.

And, of course, there are Caudwell's elaborately written but quite lucid insights into human nature, as relayed by the wry and inimitable Hilary Tamar. Like this: "One becomes accustomed in academic life to the unreasonableness of the young. They desire not merely to be understood, but to be understood by telepathy; not merely to be permitted to tell their troubles, but to be prevailed on to do so. The more care they take to conceal their feelings, the greater their disillusionment if one fails to discover them." I like this sort of stuff in my crime novels: reflections on all sides of human nature, not just the evil impulses, but ordinary everyday stuff, the kind of observations that make me trust a narrator's analysis AND their emotional

intelligence. And Professor Tamar, for all of her/his (I always picture Hilary as a woman, and for some reason looking and sounding like Sandi Toksvig, IDEK) flaws, is a believable, and quite funny, detective.

Emily says

You wouldn't think that taxes and accounting would be funny or interesting, but Sarah Caudwell manages to make them both.

I have to say, however, that I agree with Mr. Justice Arthur Welladay when he states:

In my view a man who enjoys the privileges of living in a country, and yet is not willing to make his just contribution to that country's exchequer, is no more an upright or honourable man than one who spends a week at a first-class hotel and leaves without paying his bill.

Heather says

SC is laugh-out-loud funny and then for two or three pages, usually toward the end of the book, she'll break your heart. And then go back to being sly and clever. Which is so often what the best detective fiction does -- disguised as fluffy escapism, it suddenly says something real about human experience and emotion.

Maggie says

have you read sarah caudwell? i'd never heard of her, but a friend mentioned her the other day so i got one from the library. rather delightful. quirky as all get out - the language style is terrific and unusual. of course, i've been suffering from bronchitis/fever/strep this week, so i fear that i did not do it justice - and so i plan to start it ALL OVER AGAIN IMMEDIATELY.

incidentally, the legal/tax machinations in this book are eerily prescient of the Panama Papers revelations:
[http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/06/us/...](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/06/us/)

Elizabeth says

The plot in Hilary Tamar books is almost beside the point. The point is the voice that Caudwell captures — the hyperliterate, formal, stylized, *awesome* voice. I don't know if anyone has ever actually talked like this, but oh, I hope they did, I hope someone still does, and I hope I meet that person and spend as much time as possible with them.

Also: dear jacket copy, some of us do not give a fig about Hilary Tamar's gender, preferred pronoun, or status as a hero or heroine. (No, seriously, the jacket copy says that is the central mystery.)

Mike says

Enjoyable as always but perhaps one of the weaker of the series

Leslie says

I'm rereading Sarah Caudwell this summer and having such a good time! And I really had to add a star when I finished this one; it's even better than I remembered. Mostly because a good portion of it is "narrated" by Michael Cantrip -- the story's sweetly sexy doofus (think Bertie Wooster being forced to work in a London law firm) -- via fax.

Caudwell is amazing. Who else could make mysteries based on British tax law so compelling? But though the mysteries, themselves, are very good, it's really the humor that makes you want to force these books on everyone you know. As I'm doing now. Go! Go read them! They're out of print, but you can find them online. And *believe* me, you'll be so happy you did.

P.S. You needn't really read them in order, but I do recommend saving *The Sibyl in her Grave* for last.

Susan says

Bankers and financial advisors--and lawyers, of course--exist to help people limit their tax liabilities. Even those not concerned with the tax laws of England and France, however, will be fascinated as Michael Cantrip is sent to the Channel Islands to advise a group that administers a mysterious trust. In fact, the trust is so mysterious that the administrators have lost the name of the beneficiaries. As Cantrip's friends Selena, Ragwort, Julia and his eccentric uncle Hereward eagerly await his telexes (alas that Caudwell didn't live until the age of social media!) professor Hilary Tamar begins to realize that Cantrip is in danger--but from whom?

Roshni says

Strong echoes of Wodehouse's language with the focus not at all on the mystery but on the hilarious descriptions and dialogue. Not really sure who else appreciates this pretty niche British humor, but I did.
