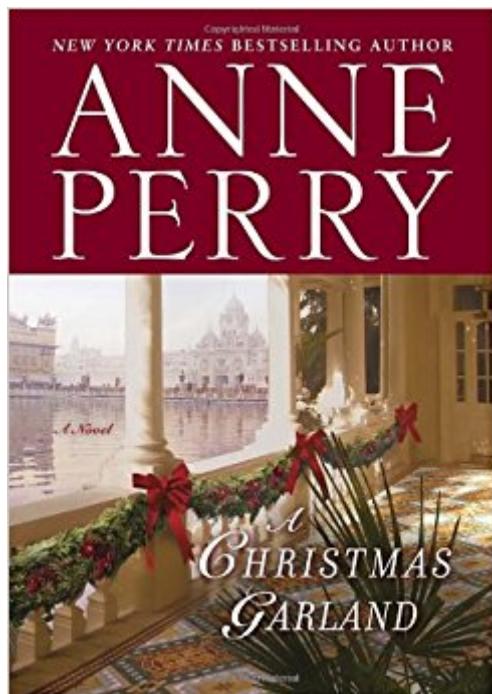


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A Christmas Garland



Synopsis

The year is 1857, soon after the tragic Siege of Cawnpore. In the British garrison, a guard is killed and an Indian prisoner escapes, which leads to yet more British deaths. Cries for revenge are overwhelming. Despite no witnesses and no evidence against him, a luckless British medical orderly named John Tallis is arrested as an accomplice simply because he was the only soldier unaccounted for when these baffling crimes were committed. Though chosen to defend Tallis, young Lieutenant Victor Narraway is not encouraged to try very hard. Narraway's superiors merely want a show trial. But inspired by a soldier's widow and her children, and by his own stubborn faith in justice, Narraway searches for the truth. In an alien world haunted by memories of massacre, he is the accused man's only hope. The trial of John Tallis equals the white-knuckle best of Anne Perry's breathtaking courtroom dramas, as Narraway struggles to persevere against appalling odds and a frightful injustice.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

When Lieutenant Victor Narraway arrives in Cawnpore, India, emotions are still raw from the 1857 Indian mutiny and the atrocities that rebels committed at the Bibighar. In addition, a prisoner, Dhuleep Singh, escaped, leading to the massacre of a British patrol. After an investigation, the army found that medical orderly Corporal John Tallis was the only man who didn't have an alibi during the escape. Tallis is being tried as a traitor, and the 20-year-old Narraway is to handle his defense. The army wants the trial and execution held quickly, and the commanding officer doesn't want Narraway making waves. Tallis, however, proclaims his innocence, and

Narraway believes him. Narraway worries his inexperience will cost Tallis his life, but then with the help of two children, he cracks the case. This engaging historical mystery offers an introspective look at the character, Narraway, who will become the future boss of Thomas Pitt, star of Perry's long-running series. Perry's tenth Christmas novel is a winner. --Sue O'Brien --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Anne Perry is the author of two Victorian-era series—a one featuring investigator William Monk, the other featuring police inspector Thomas Pitt—a series as well as a series set amid World War I. She lives in the Scottish Highlands.

Christmas comes at the end of October for me with the arrival of Anne Perry's latest Christmas novel; it's a present I can't wait to open. And *A Christmas Garland* lives up to its promise. As I read the book, two movies came to mind for two different reasons. The first was *Hart's War*, which starred Bruce Willis and Colin Farrell. Set in a prisoner of war camp in World War II, the movie features a trial in which a young, green lieutenant (Farrell) is forced by the colonel (Willis) to defend a prisoner in a court martial. The similarities between the Lt. Hart and 20-year-old Lt. Victor Narraway, are evident. Neither was in the army by choice, as Hart had been drafted and Narraway's father had forced him to join. *Four Feathers* came to mind because it is also a tale of British soldiers in a hostile land--the Sudan, in this case--where they are not wanted and are badly outnumbered by the natives, who want nothing more than to kill them all and take back their country. The soldiers in *Christmas Garland* also wonder why they are here in this alien land "for queen and country." There have been horrible atrocities including the savage deaths of the women and children that the soldiers and the men of the East Indian Company have brought with them. Lieutenant Narraway must defend Corporal John Tallis, a medical orderly who is accused of freeing a Sikh prisoner; the prisoner killed his guard, also a Sikh, and fled to the rebels to betray a patrol of which he had inside knowledge. Nine of the ten in the patrol died. Tallis has no motive. He is only on trial because he is the last man standing, so to speak. He was alone and unseen at the time of the escape, so he had no provable alibi. Narraway believes him to be innocent, as Tallis proclaims himself to be, but how can he prove it? But Narraway is a very persistent man who will not rest until he has done all he can to save Tallis and to serve justice. It is his first step on his path to his career in the police. This is a book I was truly unable to put down until I had finished it. I felt pity for Tallis and for Narraway as well, who might have been in over his head. Complicating matters is the fact that everyone wants Tallis to hang, and they want it done quickly. To make things worse, Narraway had been at school

with the major's younger brother, and they had disliked each other immensely. Although this book is quite different from most of the other Christmas novels in that it has an exotic setting and is far from the drawing rooms of England, it is as fascinating as the others. I strongly advise reading it; I know you will enjoy it and will learn something as well.

This novel is set in Cawnpore, India after the Siege of Cawnpore, 1857. A man is accused, by being the only man not accountable for, of allowing a prison break, and subsequent murder of further British deaths. A young Lieutenant, Narraway, must try to defend John Tallis knowing that it is considered only a formality and that the judge has already determined his man's guilt. In two days, Narraway has to recreate the actual break and re-interview all the persons connected. He meets the widows and children of many of the fallen soldiers. Through intense study, Lt. Narraway begins to form an alternative version of what truly happened. The courtroom drama holds you in suspense as the Lieutenant's version is played out. Will justice ring true for the Christmas season so badly needed by this garrison? This novel is quickly read and yet is not short on details or story. Ms. Perry does herself proud.

Although I'd actually gotten a bit tired of these, for a change, I actually loved last year's annual Christmas novella from Anne Perry. She typically takes a minor character from one of her series and writes a non-traditional type of Christmas story around them. In this one, she takes a minor character from one of the Pitt novels, albeit a character I'm not familiar with, and goes back to his early days as a young lieutenant in India after a siege. A prisoner escapes and, as a result, nearly an entire British patrol is killed. The lieutenant is ordered to take on the thankless task of defending the unit's popular medical orderly who is accused of murder for freeing the prisoner. That orderly is said to be the only one who was not working with anyone else at the time the crime was committed. Things seem impossible but the pressure mounts to get the trial over with before Christmas so that justice can be done and the unit can enjoy its Christmas holiday. Absolutely loved this one. It's the 10th annual Christmas novella from Perry but each is, in effect, a standalone. For anyone who enjoys a good, quick story, I'd highly recommend this one.

Victor Narraway, former head of Special Branch, is one of Perry's most interesting characters, and in this novella we see Lt Narraway when he was a 20 year old, new to the British Army and to India. We learn more about him, helping to round out his character, although I wish there had been more about his childhood included. Narraway is out of his depths, but he is never one to give up. We can

see how the man he is at 20 will grow into the man who headed Special Branch in the coming years. In the midst of the loneliness and hopelessness Narraway feels, a simple Christmas garland brings him hope and strength, something we can all identify with in some way. Perry, as usual, does a wonderful job with her characters and with her descriptions. This is set in India, after horrible events have taken place, and she infuses the story and people with a reality that keeps you there, in the dusty compound. The mystery is bound up in the horrific events of the Indian Mutiny that saw families mutilated. But, as with everything, there are two sides and Perry does not blame everything on the Indian populace that rose up against the British presence, but presents the folly of the British that contributed to it. The mystery is a simple but clever one, and it kept me wondering what was the solution until the very end. The facts are there, and there aren't any last minute surprises thrown in to make you groan in disgust. Note: for some, the recollections of the soldiers concerning the massacre might be too gory. For others, their interest in British history in India might be piqued.

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