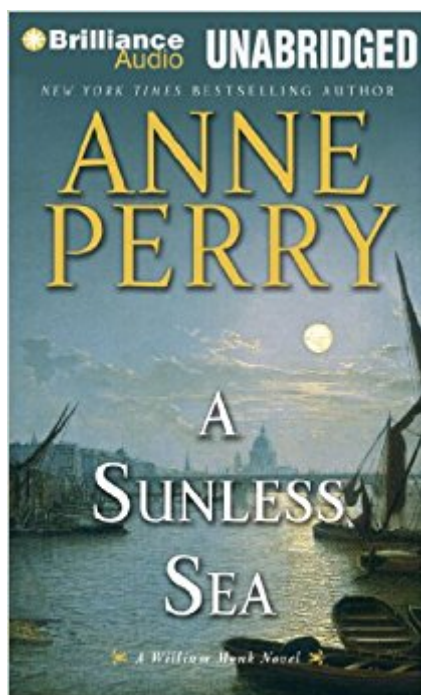


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A Sunless Sea (William Monk Series)



Synopsis

Anne Perry's spellbinding Victorian mysteries, especially those featuring William Monk, have enthralled listeners for a generation. The Plain Dealer calls Monk "a marvelously dark, brooding creation" and, true to form, this Perry masterpiece is as deceptively deep and twisty as the Thames. As commander of the River Police, Monk is accustomed to violent death, but the mutilated female body found on Limehouse Pier one chilly December morning moves him with horror and pity. The victim's name is Zenia Gadney. Her waterfront neighbors can tell him little only that the same unknown gentleman had visited her once a month for many years. She must be a prostitute, but described as quiet and kempt she doesn't appear to be a fallen woman. What sinister secrets could have made poor Zenia worth killing? And why does the government keep interfering in Monk's investigation? While the public cries out for blood, Monk, his spirited wife, Hester, and their brilliant barrister friend, Oliver Rathbone, search for answers. From dank waterfront alleys to London's fabulously wealthy West End, the three trail an ice-blooded murderer toward the unbelievable, possibly unprovable truth and ultimately engage their adversaries in an electric courtroom duel. But unless they can work a miracle, a monumental evil will go unpunished and an innocent person will hang. Anne Perry has never worn her literary colors with greater distinction than in *A Sunless Sea*, a heart-pounding novel of intrigue and suspense in which Monk is driven to make the hardest decision of his life.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review In Victorian London, anyone could go to the local druggist and pick up a pennyworth of opium from the open shelves. The drug was promoted as a panacea for many small ills, and its devastating effects were hushed up through the efforts of many of Britain's wealthiest families, whose fortunes had been built on the opium trade. Opium is the focus of Perry's latest William Monk mystery, and the horror surrounding this social evil deepens as the well-crafted novel progresses. Monk, long a member of the Metropolitan Police, is now in command of the Thames River Police, which expands Perry's atmospheric reach to include the brooding, jumbled warren of river traffic. The gutted body of a woman is discovered on Limehouse Pier. Monk's street canvassing of local prostitutes reveals a connection between the dead woman and a doctor who committed suicide some weeks before. Apparently, the doctor was devastated when his extensive report on the evils of opium use was rejected by the government. Monk's reach into this mystery is extended by his wife, Hester, a nurse who runs a women's clinic and who has contacts among both doctors and street people. The investigation concludes in a hold-your-breath trial, starring Monk's old friend, Sir Oliver Rathbone. The eighteenth Monk novel is a brilliant Victorian police procedural in which well-realized characters and settings are fascinating in themselves. And, as in all her Monk novels, Perry exhumes and exhibits yet another of the Victorian era's social evils. --Connie Fletcher
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PRAISE FOR ANNE PERRY AND HER WILLIAM MONK NOVELS

- *A Sunless Sea* – "Anne Perry's Victorian mysteries are marvels." • *The New York Times Book Review*
- *Acceptable Loss* – "Masterful storytelling and moving dialogue . . . [the] best in the series to date." • *The Star-Ledger*
- *Execution Dock* – "[An] engrossing page-turner . . . There's no one better at using words to paint a scene and then fill it with sounds and smells than Anne Perry." • *The Boston Globe*
- *Dark Assassin* – "Brilliant . . . a page-turning thriller . . . blending compelling plotting with superbly realized human emotion and exquisite period detail." • *Jeffery Deaver*, author of *Edge* and *The Shifting Tide* – "The mysterious and dangerous waterfront world of London's longest street, the Thames, comes to life." • *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*
- *Death of a Stranger* – "[A] tantalizing puzzle . . . At last, in *Death of a Stranger*, the secrets of Monk's past are dramatically revealed." • *The New York Times Book Review*

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I truly appreciate the title of this book for several reasons. First, it comes from Kublai Khan, a poem written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who was a notorious opium eater and according to legend wrote this upon awakening from an opium dream. "In Xanadu did Kublai Khan A stately pleasure dome decree, Where Alph, the sacred river, ran Through caverns measureless to man, Down to a sunless sea." Second, one could visualize opium addicts as drowning in a sea without the sun of hope to guide them to shore. A new Monk novel is always a joy to receive. I find the trio of Monk, his wife Hester, and the eminent barrister Oliver Rathbone to be one of the best in all of detective fiction. The marriage of Monk and Hester is a partnership in every sense of the word; the deep love they feel for each other is obvious, and, although it would seem they are fated not to have a child of their own, their foster son Scruff adds a dimension to it that makes me happy for them. I did miss Sir Oliver's father, who is a voice of wisdom & reality for his son and is a very likeable character. Oliver is suffering the death of his marriage; I felt sad for him even while realizing that Margaret was not really the wife he needed. Inspector Runcorn, who was for a while Monk's friend & then his nemesis, is back; he has changed greatly, largely due to finding happiness with the lovely Melisande. He works with Monk and Rathbone while Hester goes off on her own investigation; this was reminiscent of many of the Pitt & Charlotte books. The heroine is a widow who is accused of a murder followed by a ghastly mutilation of the body. Her husband had died, supposedly a suicide, two months prior to this. She is a brave and gallant woman who is willing to sacrifice herself for the love of her husband. Several of the characters Monk and Hester meet along the way are memorable, including a nurse who tends the wounded sailors and dockworkers, a doctor who was a former mentor of Hester's, and another doctor whose addiction to opium following a most painful injury has ruined his life. Rathbone has an uphill battle in the courtroom against a prosecutor who truly believes in the guilt of the accused and a judge who does not appear to be as impartial as he should be. One character must compromise his moral beliefs in the battle for justice. This was a book that only bedtime allowed me to put down. An outstanding job by my favorite author.

Anne Perry masterfully links the name of this book, *A Sunless Sea*, with the poem *Kubla Kahn* written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1797 as she did with *The Sins of the Wolf* and Dante's *Inferno*. Coleridge was a known opium user in England when the drug was totally unregulated which leads us to the main focus of this book. As opium addiction is described by the author, the image of a sunless sea is a place where there is no light--only darkness, no hope--only despair, and no

life--only death. The book opens with Monk, commander of the Thames River Police at Wapping Station, and Orme, his right-hand man, rowing together in a boat on the river about 20 feet from the Limehouse Pier, when they hear a blood-curdling scream coming from someone standing on the pier. As they dock the boat and run up the stairs, the person points to what looks like "a heap of rubbish" but is soon found to be the body of a woman who has been murdered and disemboweled. As Monk and Orme begin their investigation to determine who the woman was, they assume maybe she was a prostitute who put herself in harms way. As they search a neighborhood "about a quarter of a mile from the river" they soon discover her name is Zenia Gadney. All who knew of Zenia say she lived a quiet life with no visitors except for one man who came only once a month but hadn't been around for two months. No one seems to know who he is. Monk deduces that the man probably comes by hansom cab which turns out to be the case. With a little detective work, he learns the man is Dr. Joel Lambourn. When he visits the Lambourn home, the beautiful Dinah, his wife, tells Monk her husband is two-months dead, ruled a suicide by the police, but she doesn't believe it. She also says she knew about her husband and Zenia for many years. The mystery deepens when Monk discovers that Dr. Lambourn had written a report for the government on the dangerous unregulated use of opium as a reference for passage of a proposed Pharmacy Act regulating its use. The report was rejected and destroyed by those he gave it to, including his brother-in-law, Barclay Herne, whose wife was the sister of Dr. Lambourn. The police ruled that Dr. Lambourn's despair and embarrassment at the rejection of his work led him to commit suicide. But, who killed Zenia and what was her connection to Dr. Lambourn? Monk has found the only person with knowledge, access, and motive is Dinah Lambourn who is shortly arrested for the murder. She asks Monk if he will request that Oliver Rathbone represent her, which Oliver agrees to even though he has no evidence that she didn't do it. The courtroom drama plays an important part in this story. The judge, the prosecutor, and the witnesses all pull the reader toward the anticipated conclusion. Britain finally passed the Opium Act in 1878.

Anne Perry does it again with a great novel. . There is generally no or very little violence in her novels, but in this one the body of a woman is found who has been horribly mutilated. It is found on a dock in Monks territory, as he is with the river police in a part of London. His investigation takes him to a possible connection of a suicide two months earlier of a prominent doctor researching and writing a report for the government on the dangers of opium. Monk's wife, Hester, is the operator of a hospital for needy women and prostitutes. She is an investigator in her own right, and in helping Monk with his investigation, travels to some of the worst and most dangerous parts of London in

search for information related to the case. Other prominent people become involved and the denouement is shocking. I love her style of writing and how she weaves the plot(s) together without being overly verbose. I especially love the setting of Victorian England and the quaintness of her descriptions of the methods of travel, home life and food, etc.

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