



## Treachery at Lancaster Gate: A Charlotte and Thomas Pitt Novel

By Anne Perry

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Gripping and provocative, the latest Thomas and Charlotte Pitt mystery by *New York Times* bestselling author Anne Perry peers unflinchingly into the corrupt affairs of Victorian society on the brink of the century's turn. The world is poised for social and political change, but England holds tight to its traditions, classes, and prejudices.

When an explosion in London kills two policemen and seriously injures three more, many believe that anarchists are the culprits. But Thomas Pitt, commander of Special Branch, knows the city's radical groups well enough to suspect that someone with decidedly more personal motives lit the deadly fuse. As he investigates the source of the fatal blast, Pitt is stunned to discover that the bombing was a calculated strike against the ranks of law enforcement.

But still more shocking revelations await, as Pitt's inquiries lead him to a member of Parliament hoping for a lucrative business deal, a high-ranking police officer with secrets to keep, and an aristocratic opium addict seeking murderous revenge. As he pursues each increasingly threatening lead, Pitt finds himself impeded at every turn by the barriers put in place to protect the rich and powerful—barriers that, as they start to crumble, threaten to bury him alive.

**Praise for Anne Perry's most recent Charlotte and Thomas Pitt novels**

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"Thoroughly enjoyable and entertaining . . . The period detail is beautifully done, and realistic characters and tense action are woven seamlessly together."—*Historical Novels Review*

***Midnight at Marble Arch***

“Sweeping and scandalous . . . Perry has perfected a delicate touch.”—*The New York Times Book Review*

***Dorchester Terrace***

“The always clever Anne Perry infuses *Dorchester Terrace* with the right amount of intrigue and complex relationships that have made this prolific series one of the finest in modern mystery fiction.”—*Bookreporter*

***Treason at Lisson Grove***

“Perry has always done her historical homework on the darker elements of the British ruling class, and she has outdone herself this time.”—*The Washington Times*

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**Editorial Review**

Review

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About the Author

**Anne Perry** is the bestselling author of two acclaimed series set in Victorian England: the Charlotte and Thomas Pitt novels, including *The Angel Court Affair* and *Death on Blackheath*, and the William Monk novels, including *Corridors of the Night* and *Blood on the Water*. She is also the author of a series of five World War I novels, as well as thirteen holiday novels, most recently *A Christmas Escape*, and a historical novel, *The Sheen on the Silk*, set in the Ottoman Empire. Anne Perry lives in Los Angeles and Scotland.

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chapter

1

Pitt stood in the middle of the street looking at the smoldering ruins of the house. The fire brigade had thoroughly hosed the small bursts of flame here and there, and the water had puddled on the floor and settled into the craters left by the bomb that had detonated approximately forty-five minutes ago. It was midday but the sky was still clouded with smoke and the stench of it was everywhere.

Pitt moved out of the way as two ambulance men lifted a wounded man onto a makeshift litter and carried him out to the waiting ambulance. The horses were shifting their weight impatiently. They knew the smell of burning in the early winter air and each crash of collapsing timber startled them, though they waited obediently.

“That’s it, sir,” the white-faced constable said to Pitt, blinking rapidly. Perhaps it was the smoke that stung the man’s eyes, but more probably it was emotion. All of the men who had been caught in the explosion were police: five of them altogether. “That’s the last of them out.”

“Thank you.” Pitt acknowledged the words. “How many dead?”

“Hobbs and Newman, sir. We didn’t move the bodies.” The constable coughed and tried to clear his throat. “Ednam, Bossiney, and Yarcombe are pretty badly injured, sir.”

“Thank you,” Pitt repeated. His mind was teeming with thoughts, and yet he could not come up with anything to say that would give any real comfort to the constable. Pitt was head of Special Branch, that discreet part of Security that dealt with threats to the nation—sabotage, assassinations, bombings, any form of terrorism. He had seen destruction and violent death more times than he cared to remember. In fact, before Special Branch he had been in the regular police, dealing primarily with cases of murder.

But this was a deliberate attack directed specifically at the police: colleagues he had known and worked with over the years. He could remember Newman getting married, Hobbs’s first promotion. Now he had to search this wreckage for their bodies.

He turned and started to move slowly, picking his way so as not to disturb what was left of the situation—the evidence, if it could be called such. They already knew it was a bomb blast. Two people had been close enough to witness it. They had heard the explosion and seen the rubble flying, and then the flames as the wood caught fire. Now they were sitting in the back of an ambulance as one of the drivers finished binding up a gash in an arm caused by flying glass. There were shards everywhere from exploded windows. Both of the witnesses looked battered and shocked, but Pitt would have to interview them.

He spoke to the man first. He looked to be in his sixties, white-haired, dressed in a formal coat. Likely he had been on his way back home from church. There were cuts on the right side of his face, and a burn across his cheek, as if a piece of flaming wood had caught him. His right side was smeared with dust and there were small burns in the fabric of his clothes.

“On my way home from church, God help us,” the man said shakily after Pitt had introduced himself and apologized for disturbing him. “What kind of people would do this?” He was frightened, and trying desperately not to show it in front of the woman. His wife, Pitt assumed. He must have been walking on the outside, as a man would, and she had been closer to the blast and was more seriously hurt. It was her arm the ambulance man was binding.

“Did you see anyone else in the street?” Pitt asked. “Anyone at all? Any witnesses might help.”

“No .??. no, I didn’t. We were talking to each other,” the man replied. “Who would do this? What do they want?”

“I don’t know, sir. But we’ll find out,” Pitt promised. The ambulance man caught Pitt’s eye, his glance indicating that Pitt should hurry. Blood was already beginning to seep through the bandage on the woman’s

arm as he added another layer, and she looked pale.

Pitt handed his card to the man. He didn't see any point in delaying them further. "Thank you. That's all for now. If you remember anything, please let us know." He wished them well, and with a nod to the ambulance man he walked back toward the house. It was time to go in and look at the bodies, gather whatever evidence there was.

He skirted around a block of fallen masonry, picking his way carefully. He could taste burning in the air, and yet it was cold.

"Sir!" a fireman called out. "You can't come in here! It's .??.?"

Pitt kept on walking, his feet crunching on broken glass. "Commander Pitt," he introduced himself.

"Oh .??. well, watch where you put your feet, sir. And your head." He glanced upward at a broken beam that was hanging at a crazy angle, swaying a little, as if it could become detached and fall off any moment. "You still shouldn't ought to be here," he added.

"The dead men?" Pitt requested.

"It's dangerous in here," the man pointed out. "They'll not be going nowhere, sir. Best you let us get them out. The blast killed them, sir. No doubt about that."

Pitt would have liked the excuse not to look at the bodies, but there was none. He might learn nothing useful, but it would be a beginning of facing the reality and coming to terms with it.

He was standing in front of the fireman. The man was pale-faced, apart from the black ash smudges on his cheeks. His uniform was filthy, and wet. When he had time to think about it, he would realize he was cold as well.

"The bodies?" Pitt nudged him as gently as he could.

"That way, sir," the man said reluctantly. "But be careful. You'd be best not to touch anything. Bring the whole lot down on top o' yourself."

"I won't," Pitt responded, beginning the awkward journey, trying to avoid tripping. If he fell he would almost certainly bang into a jutting wall strut, a piece of smashed furniture, or something dangling from where the ceiling used to be.

The floorboards were half up, torn by the blast. It must have been a large bomb and, to judge by the burning and the angles of the broken wood, he was near the center of it. What on earth had happened here in the quiet house on a pleasant London street near Kensington Gardens? Anarchists? London was full of them. Half the revolutionaries in Europe had either lived here or passed through. In this year of 1898 there had been less terrorist activity than in the recent past, but now, almost at the close of the year, it seemed Special Branch's sense of ease was misplaced. Was this the dying blow, or the first outrider of another storm? Nihilists in Europe had assassinated President Carnot of France, Tsar Alexander II of Russia, the Spanish prime minister, Cánovas del Castillo, and, earlier this year, the empress Elisabeth of Austria-Hungary. Perhaps the violence was now coming here to England as well?

In front of Pitt there was a body, or what was left of it. Suddenly he could not swallow, and he thought for a moment that he was going to be sick. One leg was entirely gone, one side of the chest caved in under part of a beam from the rafters. But the man's face was oddly unmarked. Pitt could recognize Newman.

He would have to go and see Newman's widow, say all the usual words of grief. It would not help, but its omission would hurt.

He stared at the body. Did it tell him anything, other than what the fireman had already said? There was no smoke on Newman's face. His left arm was mostly gone, but when Pitt looked more closely he saw his right hand was clean. Did that mean he was already inside here when the bomb went off? He had not battled his way through smoke and rubble. Why had he come here? Trouble reported? An alarm of some sort? Following someone? A meeting already arranged? An ambush?

He turned and moved away, dizzy for a moment. He took a deep breath, steadied himself, and pressed on.

The second body was half-obscured by fallen plaster and wood, but it was far less obviously damaged. There was little smoke or dust on Hobbs's face and his pattern of freckles was easily recognizable. Pitt studied him as dispassionately as he could, trying to learn something from the way the debris lay around him. The police surgeon would be able to tell him more, but it appeared that Hobbs had been caught by surprise, and much further from the site of the explosion than Newman.

Pitt was still staring at the surroundings when he heard footsteps somewhere behind him. He turned and saw the familiar figure of Samuel Tellman picking his way through the plaster, water, and charred wood. Tellman had been Pitt's sergeant when they were both at Bow Street. It had taken them a long time to be comfortable with each other. Tellman had distrusted anyone with a background as humble as Pitt's but who spoke like a gentleman. To him it seemed that Pitt's accent was affected, as if Pitt thought himself superior. Pitt felt no reason to explain that his speech was the product of having been educated along with Sir Arthur Desmond's son at the country estate where his father had been gamekeeper. When his father had been transported to Australia for a crime he had not committed, Pitt's mother had remained as laundress, and Sir Arthur had seen the young Pitt as a companion to his son and a spur to excel him in class. The whole story was a wound that still ached on his father's behalf, and it wasn't something he wished to discuss with Tellman. But years of working together had taught them a mutual respect, and loyalty.

"Good afternoon, sir." Tellman stopped beside him.

"Good afternoon, Inspector," Pitt replied.

Tellman stared down at the body. "I'm your liaison with the police, sir."

Pitt had expected someone to provide liaison, partly because he was Special Branch and not in the regular police, but mostly because the victims were the police's own men. The internal loyalty of the police force was not unlike that of soldiers in an army at war. An officer facing danger had to have an absolute trust in those who stood beside him, or at his back.

Pitt nodded. It would be good to work with Tellman again—but he wished it were on anything other than this.

"Looks like they were right here when it went off," Pitt observed. "Newman must have been closest to it."



“Yes. I saw. What kind of a bloody lunatic would do this?” Tellman’s voice was tight, as if he were controlling it with difficulty. “I want freedom for all men, and food, and houses, and the right to come and go as I please. But what the hell good does something like this do? Which anarchists did this, anyway? Spanish? Italian? French? Russian? Why in God’s name do all the bloody lunatics in Europe come and live in London?” He turned to face Pitt. “Why do we let them?” His face was white, two spots of color in his lean cheeks, anger in his eyes. “Don’t you know who they are? Isn’t that what Special Branch is supposed to be for, to prevent exactly this from happening?”

Pitt hunched his shoulders and drove his hands deeper into his pockets. “I don’t make the policy, Tellman. And yes, I know who a lot of them are. Mostly they just talk.”

The disgust and the pain in Tellman’s face were more powerful than words. “I’ll find them and hang them—whatever you want to do about it.” It was a challenge.

Pitt did not bother to answer. He understood the emotion behind the words. Right at this moment he felt much the same. He might feel differently when he learned who was responsible. Some of the men branded as anarchists had done no more than protest for decent pay, enough to feed their families. A few of them had been imprisoned, tortured, and even executed, simply for protesting against injustice. Driven far enough, he might have done the same.

“Why were these men here?” he asked Tellman. “Five of them, at this quiet house right on the park? It can’t have been an inquiry. You don’t need five men for that. There’s no one else dead or hurt, so the house must have been empty. What were they doing?”

Tellman’s expression tightened. “I don’t know yet, but I mean to find out. But if the investigation was to do with anarchists, they would have told Special Branch what was going on. So it must be something else.”

Pitt did not take that totally for granted as Tellman seemed to, but it was not the time to argue. “Anything known about this address?” he asked instead.

“Not yet.” Tellman looked around him. “What about the bomb? Bombs are your business. What was it made of? Where was it put? How did they let it off?”

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