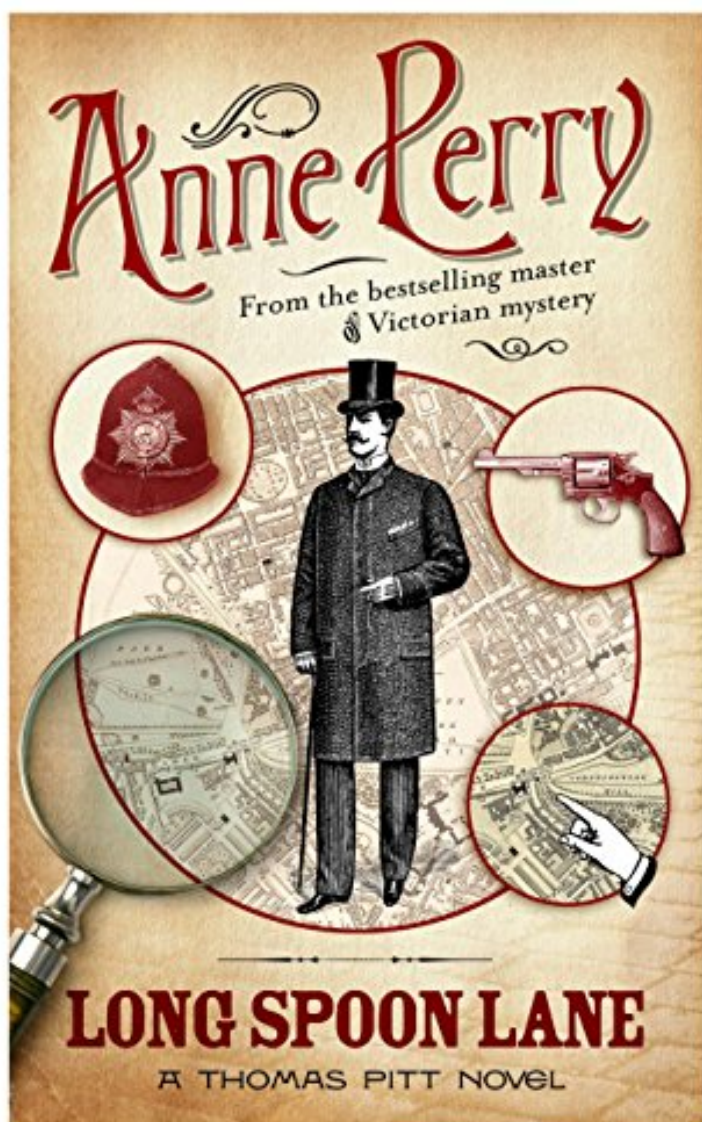


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Long Spoon Lane (Thomas Pitt Mystery, Book 24): A gripping novel exploring the secrets of Victorian society



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteur Not even the police force is free from corruption... Anne Perry's bestselling Inspector Pitt novels entice readers into a literary world almost as real as the original, and are perfect for fans of C. J. Samson and Ann Granger. In Long Spoon Lane, flower sellers, costermongers, shopkeepers, and hansom drivers ply their trades, while the London police watch over all. Or so people believe... "The period setting

allows both some thoughtful debate on a difficult problem and a solution more reassuring than anything you'll find in tomorrow's papers' - Kirkus sEarly one morning, two bombs explode in an East London street.

Forewarned of the attack, Thomas Pitt of the Special Branch, arrives in time to chase the bombers to a tenement in Long Spoon Lane. There, two men are arrested and one shot dead; but who and where and is the killer? As Pitt investigates, he uncovers truths more disturbing than the acts of a few misguided idealists.

There's a web of corruption within the police force, and all the clues point to Inspector Wetrone of Bow Street as its mastermind. But as head of the sinister Inner Circle, Wetrone has powerful allies in every sphere. What

readers are saying about Long Spoon Lane: '[Anne Perry] is quite exceptional in her ability to craft a complex plot with wholesome characters in a fascinating period/location. I can barely wait for Pitt's next adventure'"Totally captivating, I could not put it down' 'Five stars'ExtraitChapter One The hansom cab lurched around the corner, throwing Pitt forward almost onto his knees. Victor Narraway, his companion, swore. Pitt regained his balance as they gathered speed towards Aldgate and Whitechapel High Street. The horses hooves struck hard on the cobbles and ahead of them traffic was scattering out of the way. Thank heaven this early there was little enough of it: a few costermongers carts with fruit and vegetables, a brewers dray, goods wagons, and one horse-drawn omnibus.Right! Narraway shouted at the driver. Commercial

Road! Its faster!The driver obeyed without answering. It was fifteen minutes before six on a summer morning and there were already laborers, hawkers, tradesmen, and domestic servants about. Please heaven they would be in Myrdle Street before six o'clock!Pitt felt as if his heart were beating in his throat. The call had come just over half an hour ago, but it felt like an eternity. The telephone had woken him and he had gone racing downstairs in his nightshirt. Narraways voice had been crackly and breathless on the other end.

I've sent a cab for you. Meet me on Cornhill, north side, outside the Royal Exchange. Immediately. Anarchists are going to bomb a house on Myrdle Street. Then he had hung up without waiting for a reply, leaving Pitt to go back upstairs and tell Charlotte before he scrambled into his clothes. She had run downstairs and fetched him a glass of milk and a slice of bread, but there had been no time for tea.He had stood a cold, impatient five minutes on the pavement outside the Royal Exchange until Narraways cab arrived and slithered to a halt. Then the drivers long whip snaked out and urged the horse forward again even before Pitt had fallen into the other seat.Now they were charging towards Myrdle Street and he still had very little idea what it was about, except that the information had come from Narraways own sources on the fringes of the seething East End underworldthe province of cracksmen, macers, screevers, footpads, and the swarming thieves of every kind that preyed on the river.Why Myrdle Street? he shouted. Who are they?Could be anyone, Narraway replied without taking his eyes off the road. Special Branch had been created originally to deal with Irish Fenians in London, but now they dealt with all threats to the safety of the country. Just at the momentearly summer 1893the danger at the front of most peoples minds was anarchist bombers. There had been several incidents in Paris, and London had suffered half a dozen explosions of one degree or another.Narraway had no idea whether this latest threat came from the Irish, who were still pursuing Home Rule, or revolutionaries simply desiring to overthrow the government, the throne, or law and order in general.They swung left around the corner up into Myrdle Street, across the junction, and stopped. Just up ahead the police were busy waking people up, hurrying them out of their homes and into the road.

There was no time to look for treasured possessions, not even to grasp onto more than a coat or a shawl against the cool air of the morning.Pitt saw a constable of about twenty chivvy along an old woman. Her white hair hung in thin wisps over her shoulders, her arthritic feet bare on the cobbles. Suddenly he almost choked with fury against whoever was doing this.A small boy wandered across the street, blinking in bewilderment, dragging a mongrel puppy on a length of string.Narraway was out of the cab and striding towards the nearest constable, Pitt on his heels. The constable swiveled around to tell him to go back, his face flushed with anxiety and annoyance. Yer gotta get out o the way, sir. He waved his arm. Well back, sir. Theres a bomb in one o . . . I know! Narraway said smartly. Im Victor Narraway, head of Special Branch. This is my associate, Thomas Pitt. Do you know where the bomb is?The constable stood half to attention, still holding his right hand out to bar people from returning to their homes in the still, almost breathless morning air. No sir, he replied. Not to be exact. We reckon its gotter be one o them two over there. He inclined his head towards the opposite side of the street. Narrow, three-story houses huddled together, doors wide open, front steps whitened by proud, hardworking women. A cat wandered out of one of them, and a child shouted to it eagerly and it ran towards her.Is everyone out? Narraway demanded.Yes, sir, far as we can tellThe rest of his answer was cut off by a shattering explosion. It came at first like a sharp crack, and then a roar and a tearing and crumbling. A huge chunk of one of the houses lifted in the air then blew apart.

Rubble fell crashing into the street and over other roofs, smashing slates and toppling chimneys. Dust and flames filled the air. People were shouting hysterically. Someone was screaming. The constable was shouting too, his mouth wide open, but his words were lost in the noise. His body staggered oddly as if his legs would not obey him. He lurched forward, waving his arms as people stood rooted to the ground in horror. Another blast roared somewhere inside the second house. The walls shivered and seemed to subside upon themselves, bricks and plaster falling outward. Then there was more flame, black smoke gushing up. Suddenly people started to run. Children were sobbing, someone was cursing loudly, and several dogs burst into frenzied barking. An old man was swearing steadily at everything he could think of, repeating himself over and over. Narraways face was white, his black eyes like holes in his head. They had never expected to be able to prevent the bombs going off, but it was still a searing defeat to see such wreckage strewn across the road, and terrified and bewildered people stumbling around. The flames were getting hold of the dry lath and timber and beginning to spread. A fire engine pulled up, its horses sweating, their eyes rolling. Men leapt out and started to uncoil the big, canvas hoses, but it was going to be a hopeless task. Pitt felt a stunning sense of failure. Special Branch was for preventing things like this. And now that it had happened there was nothing comforting or purposeful he could do. He did not even know if there would be a third bomb, or a fourth. Another constable came sprinting along the street, arms waving wildly, his helmet jammed crookedly on his head. Other side! he shouted. Theyre getting away on the other side! It was a moment before Pitt realized what he meant. Narraway knew immediately. He twisted on his heel and started back towards the hansom. Pitt galvanized into action, catching up with Narraway just as he swung up into the cab, barking at the driver to go back to Fordham Street and turn east. The man obeyed instantly, snaking the long carriage whip over the horses back and urging it forward. They went to the left, crossed Essex Street barely hesitating, and glimpsed another hansom disappearing north up New Road towards Whitechapel. After them! Narraway shouted, ignoring the morning traffic of delivery carts and drays, which swerved out of their way and jammed together. There had been no time to ask who the bombers might be, but as they slewed around the corner into Whitechapel Road, and past the London Hospital, Pitt turned his mind to it. The anarchist threats so far had been disorganized and no specific demands had been made. London was the capital of an empire that stretched across almost every continent on the earth, and the islands between, and it was also the biggest port in the world. There was a constant influx of every nationality under the sun recently in particular immigrants had arrived from Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Russia, seeking to escape the power of the tsar. Others from Spain and Italy, and especially France, had more socialist aims in mind. Beside him Narraway was craning forward, his lean body rigid. His face turned first one way then the other as he sought to catch a glimpse of the hansom ahead. Whitechapel had turned into Mile End Road. They passed the huge block of Charringtons Brewery on the left. It makes no damn sense! he said bitterly. The cab ahead of them turned left up Peters Street. It had barely straightened when it disappeared to the right into Willow Place and then Long Spoon Lane. Pitt and Narraways cab overshot and had to turn and double back. By that time there were two more cabs slithering to a halt with policemen piling out of them, and the original cab had gone. Long Spoon Lane was narrow and cobbled. Its gray tenement buildings rose up sheer for three stories, grimy, stained with the smoke and damp of generations. The air smelled of wet rot and old sewage. Pitt glanced along both sides, east and west. Several doorways were boarded up. A large woman stood blocking another, hands on her hips, glaring at the disturbance to her routine. To the west one door slammed, but when two constables charged with their shoulders to it, it did not budge. They tried again and again with no effect. It must be barricaded, Narraway said grimly. Get back! he ordered the men. Pitt felt a chill. Narraway must fear the anarchists were armed. It was absurd. Less than two hours ago he had been lying in bed half-asleep, Charlottes hair a dark river across the pillow beside him. The early sunlight had made a bright bar between the curtains, and busy sparrows chattered in the trees outside. Now he stood shivering as he stared up at the ugly wall of a tenement building in which were hiding desperate young men who had bombed a whole row of houses. There were a dozen police in the street now and Narraway had taken over from the sergeant in charge of them. He was directing some to the other alleys. Pitt saw with a cold misery that the most recent to arrive were carrying guns. He realized there was no alternative. It was a crime of rare and terrible violence. There could be no quarter given to those who had committed it. Now the street was oddly quiet. Narraway came back, his coat flapping, his face pinched, mouth a tight, thin line. Dont stand there like a damn lamppost, Pitt. Youre a gamekeepers son, dont tell me you dont know how to fire a gun! Here. He held up a rifle, his knuckles white, and pushed it at Pitt. It was on Pitts tongue to say that gamekeepers didnt shoot at people, when he realized it was not only irrelevant, it was untrue. More than one poacher had suffered a

bottom full of buckshot. Reluctantly he took the gun, and then the ammunition. He backed away to the far side. He smiled with a twist of irony, finding himself standing behind the only lamppost. Narraway kept to the shadow of the buildings opposite, walking rapidly along the narrow shelf of footpath, speaking to the police where they were taking as much cover as there was. Apart from his footsteps there was no other sound. The horses and cabs had been moved away, out of danger. Everyone who lived here had vanished inside. The minutes dragged by. There was no movement opposite. Pitt wondered if they were certain the anarchists were in there. Automatically he looked up at the rooftops. They were steep, pitched too sharply to get a foothold, and there were no dormers to climb out of, no visible skylights. Narraway was coming back.

He saw Pitt's glance and a flash of humor momentarily lit his face. No, thank you, he said drily. If I send anyone up there, it won't be you. Your trip over your own coattails. And before you ask, yes, I've got men round the back and at both ends. He took a careful position between Pitt and the wall. Pitt smiled. Narraway grunted. I'm not waiting them out all day, he said sourly. I've sent Stamper for some old wagons, something solid enough to take a few bullets. We'll tip them on their sides to give us enough shelter, then we'll go in. Pitt nodded, wishing he knew Narraway better. He did not yet trust him as he had Micah Drummond, or John

Cornwallis when he had been an ordinary policeman in Bow Street. He had respected both men and understood their duties. He had also been intensely aware of their humanity, their vulnerabilities as well as their skills. Pitt had never set out to join Special Branch. His own success against the powerful secret society

known as the Inner Circle had contrived an apparent disgrace, which had cost him a position in the Metropolitan Police. For his safety, and to provide him with some kind of job, he had been found a place in Special Branch to work for Victor Narraway. He had been superseded in Bow Street by Wetron, who was himself a member of the Inner Circle, and now its leader. Pitt felt uncertain, too often wrong-footed. Special Branch, with its secrets, its deviousness, and its half-political motives, required a set of skills he was only just beginning to learn. He had too few parameters by which to judge Narraway. But he was also aware that if he had gone on to further promotion in Bow Street he would soon have lost his connection with the reality of crime. His compassion for the pain of it would have dimmed. Everything would have been at second hand, particularly his power to influence. His situation now was better, even standing outside in a chilly lane with Narraway, waiting to storm an anarchist stronghold. The moment of arrest was never easy or pleasant. Crime was always someone's tragedy. Pitt realized he was hungry, but above all he would have loved a hot cup of tea. His mouth was dry, and he was tired of standing in one spot. Although it was a summer morning, it was still cold here in the shadow. The stone pavement was damp from the night's dew. He could smell the stale odor of wet wood and drains. There was a rumble on the cobbles at the far end of the lane, and an old cart turned in, pulled by a rough-coated horse. When it reached the middle of the lane, the driver jumped down. He unharnessed the animal and led it away at a trot. A moment later another, similar cart appeared and was placed behind it. Both were tipped on their sides. Right, Narraway said quietly, straightening up. His face was grim. In the sharp, pale light, every tiny line in it was visible. It seemed as if each passion he had experienced in his life had written its mark on him, but the overwhelming impression he gave was of unbreakable strength. There were half a dozen police now along the length of the street. Most of them seemed to have guns. There were others at the back of the buildings, and at the ends of the lane. Three men moved forward with a ram to force the door. Then an upstairs window smashed, and everyone froze. An instant later there was gunfire, bullets ricocheting off the walls at shoulder height and above. Fortunately no one staggered or fell. The police started to fire back. Two more windows broke. In the distance a dog was barking furiously, and there was a dull rumble of heavy traffic from Mile End Road, a street away. The shooting started again. Pitt was reluctant to join in. Even with all the crimes he had investigated through his years in the police, he had never had to fire a gun at a human being. The thought was a cold pain inside him. Then Narraway sprinted over to where two men were crouching behind the carts, and a bullet thudded into the wall just above Pitt's head. Without stopping to think about it, he raised his gun and fired back at the window from which it had come. The men with the ram had reached the far side of the street and were out of the line of fire. Every time a shadow moved behind the remains of the glass in the windows, Pitt fired at it, reloading quickly after. He hated shooting at people, yet he found his hands were steady and there was a kind of exhilaration beating inside him. Higher up the street there was more shooting. Narraway looked over at Pitt, a warning in his eyes, then he strode across the cobbles to the men with the ram. Another volley of shots rang out from an upstairs window, cracking on the walls and ricocheting, or thudding, embedded in the wood of the carts. Pitt fired back, then changed the direction of his aim. It was a different window, one from which nobody had fired before. He could see the shattered glass now, bright in the reflected sunlight. There

were shots from several places, the house, the street below it, and at the far end of the lane. A policeman crumpled and fell. No one moved to help him. Pitt fired upward again, one window then another, wherever he saw a shadow move, or the flash of gunpowder. Still no one went for the wounded man. Pitt realized no one could, they were all too vulnerable. A bullet hit the metal of the lamppost beside him with a sharp clang, making his pulse leap and his breath catch in his throat. He steadied his hand deliberately for the next shot back, and sent it clear through the window. His aim was getting better. He left the shelter of the lamppost and set off across the street towards the constable on the ground. He had about seventy feet to go. Another shot went past him and hit the wall. He tripped and half fell just short of the man. There was blood on the stones. He crawled the last yard. Its all right, he said urgently. Ill get you safe, then we can have a look at you. He had no idea whether the constable could hear him or not. His face was pasty white and his eyes were closed. He looked about twenty. There was blood on his mouth. There was no way Pitt could carry him because he dared not stand up; he would make a perfect target. He might even be accidentally hit by a ricocheting bullet from his own men, who were now firing rapidly again. He bent and picked up the constables shoulders, and inching backwards awkwardly, pulled him over the cobbles, until at last they were in the shelter of the carts. Youll be all right, he said again, more to himself than anyone else. To his surprise the mans eyes flickered open and he gave a weak smile. Pitt saw with heart-lurching relief that the blood on his mouth was from a cut across his cheek. Quickly he examined him as much as he could, to find at least where he was hit, and bind it. He kept on talking quietly, to reassure them both. He found the wound in the shoulder. It was bloody but not fatal. Probably hitting his head on the cobbles as he fell had been what had knocked him senseless. Without his helmet, it would have been worse. Pitt did what he could with a torn-off sleeve to make a pad and press it onto the site of the bleeding. By the time he was finished perhaps four or five minutes later others were there to help. He left them to get the man out, and picked up his gun again. Bending low, he ran over to the men with the ram just as the frame splintered and the door crashed open against the wall. Immediately inside was a narrow stairway. The men ran up ahead of him, Narraway on their heels, Pitt right behind. There was a shot from above them, raised voices and footsteps, then more shots in the distance, probably at the back of the house. He went up the stairs two at a time. On the third floor up he found a wide room, probably having originally been two. Narraway was standing in the hard light from the broken windows. At the far end, the door to the stairs down towards the back was swinging open. There were three police cradling guns, and two young men standing still, almost frozen. One had long dark hair and wild eyes. Without the blood and the swelling on his face he would have been handsome. The other was thinner, almost emaciated, his hair red-gold. His eyes were almost too pale greenish-blue. They both looked frightened and trying to be defiant. Simply and violently two of the police forced the manacles on them. Narraway inclined his head towards the doorway where Pitt was standing in a silent instruction to the police to take the prisoners away. Pitt stepped aside to let them pass, then looked around the room. It was unfurnished except for two chairs and a bundle of blankets crumpled in a heap at the farther end. The windows were all broken and the wall pockmarked with bullet holes. It was what he had expected to see, except for the figure lying prone on the floor with his head towards the center window. His thick, dark brown hair was matted with blood and he did not move. Pitt went over to him and knelt down. He was dead. There was even more blood on the floor. A single shot had killed him. It had gone in the back of his skull and emerged at the front, destroy- ing the left side of his face. The right side suggested he had been handsome in life. There was no expression left but the remnants of surprise. Pitt had investigated many murders it was his profession but few were as bloody as this. The only decent thing about this death was that it must have been instant. Still, he felt his stomach tighten and he swallowed to keep his gorge from rising. Please God it was not one of his bullets that had done this. Narraway spoke softly from just behind him. Pitt had not heard his footsteps. Try his pockets, he said. Something might tell us who he is. Pitt moved the mans hand, which was in the way. It was slender and well-shaped, with a signet ring on the third finger, expensive, well-crafted, and almost certainly gold. Pitt turned the ring experimentally. It came off with only a little effort. He looked at it more closely. It was hallmarked on the inside, and there was a family crest on it. Narraway held out his hand, palm up. Pitt gave it to him, then bent to the body again and started to look through the pockets of the jacket. He found a handkerchief, a few coins, and a note addressed Dear Magnus. Most of the rest of the paper was missing, as if it had been used for a further message. Dear Magnus, Pitt said aloud. Narraway was looking at the ring, his lips pursed. In the hard morning light his face was troubled and weary. Landsborough, he said as if in answer. Pitt was startled. Do you know him? Narraway did not meet his eyes. Seen him a couple of times. He was Lord Landsboroughs son only son. His expression was unreadable.

Pitt did not know whether the heaviness in it was sorrow, anxiety for trouble to come, or simply distaste for having to break such news to the family. Could he have been a hostage? Pitt asked. Possibly, Narraway conceded. One thing for certain, I don't know how he could have been shot through the window, in the back of his head, and fallen like that. He wasn't moved, Pitt said with certainty. If he had been, there'd be blood all over the place. A wound like . . . I can see that for myself! Narraway's voice was suddenly thick, emotion crowding through it. It could have been pity, or even sheer physical revulsion. Of course he wasn't moved. Why the hell would they move him? He was shot from inside the room, that's obvious. The question is why, and by whom? Maybe you're right, and he was a hostage. God Almighty, what a mess! Well, get up off the floor, man! The surgeon will come and get him, and we'll see if he can tell us anything. We must question these two before the police muddy everything up. I hate using them but I have no choice. That's the law! He swung around and strode to the door. Well, come on! Let's see what they have at the back! Downstairs the sergeant on duty was defiant, as if Narraway accused him of having let the murderer past. We didn't see him, sir. Your man came down the stairs, yelling after me, but he didn't go past us! You must have still got him somewhere. Which man of mine? Narraway demanded. How could we know, sir? the sergeant asked. He just came running down the stairs shouting at us to stop him, but there weren't no one to stop! We found two anarchists alive and one dead, Narraway said grimly. There were four men in that room, maybe five. That means at least one got away. The sergeant's face set hard, his blue eyes like stone. If you say so, sir. But he didn't come past us. Maybe he doubled back on the ground floor and went out the front, while you was upstairs, sir? It was said with an insolent edge. Some police did not like being seconded to do Special Branch's arrest work, but since Special Branch had no power to do it themselves, there was no choice. Or went out and straight back into one of the other buildings? Pitt suggested quickly. We'd better search them all. Do it, Narraway said curtly. And look everywhere, in every room, in beds, if there are any, cupboards, under rubbish or old clothes, if there are lofts, even if it's only space enough to crawl. And up the chimneys, such as they are. He turned and strode along the length of the alley, staring up at the other houses, at the rooftops and at every door. Pitt followed on his heels. Fifteen minutes later they were back at the front door on Long Spoon Lane. The full daylight was cold and gray and there was a sharp edge to the wind down the alley. No anarchist had been found hiding anywhere. No policeman from the front admitted to having seen anyone or chased them inside the building, and no one had emerged at the front. The sergeant at the back did not change his story by so much as a word. White-faced and furious, Narraway was forced to accept that whoever else had been in the house where Magnus Landsborough lay dead, he, or they, had escaped. Nothing! the young man with the dark hair replied with contempt. He was in the cell at the police station, sitting on a straight-backed wooden chair, his hands still manacled. The only light came from one small, high window in the outer wall. He had said his name was Welling, but he would give no more. Both Pitt and Narraway had tried to glean from him any information about his colleagues, their aims or allies, where they had obtained the dynamite or the money to purchase it. The man with the fair skin and red-gold hair had given his name as Carmody, but he too refused to say anything of his fellows. He was in a separate cell; for the moment, alone. Narraway leaned back against the whitewashed stone wall, his face creased with tiredness. No point in asking anymore. His voice was flat, as if accepting defeat. They'll go to the grave without telling us what it's all about. Either they don't know the point of it, or there isn't one. It's just mindless violence for the sake of it. I know! Welling said between his teeth. Narraway looked at him, affecting only the slightest interest. Really? You will go to your grave, and I shall not know, he continued. That's unusual for an anarchist. Most of you are fighting for something, and a grand gesture like being hanged is rather pointless if no one knows why you go to it like a cow to the abattoir. Welling froze, his eyes wide, his lean chest barely rising or falling with his breath. You can't hang me. No one was killed. One constable was hit, and you can't prove that was me, because it wasn't. Wasn't it? Narraway said casually, as if he neither knew nor cared if it were true. You bastard! Welling spat with stinging contempt. Suddenly his pretense of calm was gone, and the anger exploded through him. His face was slicked with sweat, his eyes widened. You're just like the police—corrupt to the bone! His voice shook. No, it wasn't me! But you don't care, do you! Just so long as you have someone to blame, and anyone will do! For a moment Pitt was merely aware that Narraway had provoked Welling into response, then he realized what Welling had said about the police. It was not the accusation that stung, but the passion in his voice. He believed what he was saying, enough to face them with it, even now when it could cost him the last hope of mercy. There's a lot of difference between incompetence and corruption, Pitt said. Of course there's the odd bad policeman, just as there is the odd bad doctor, or . . . He stopped. The scorn in Welling's face was so violent it distorted his features grotesquely,

like a white mask under his black hair. Narraway did not interrupt. He watched Pitt, then Welling, waiting for the next one to speak. Pitt breathed in and out slowly. The silence prickled. Don't tell me you care! Welling made it a stinging accusation. Neither do you, apparently, Pitt replied, forcing himself to smile. That was not easy. He had been a policeman all his adult life. He had devoted his time and energy, working long days, enduring emotional exhaustion to seek justice, or at least some resolution of tragedy and crime. To place a slur on both the honesty and the ideals of the men he worked with robbed from him the meaning of a quarter of a century of his past, and his belief in the force that defended the future. Without police of integrity there was no justice but vengeance, and no protection but the violence of the powerful. That truly was anarchy.

And this smug young man in front of him would lose as much as anyone. He could survive to plant his bombs only because the rest of society obeyed the laws. Pitt let his own contempt fill his voice when he answered. If the police were largely corrupt, you wouldn't be sitting here being questioned, he said gratingly. We'd simply have shot you. It would be easy enough to make an excuse afterward. Any story would do! He heard how harsh and on the edge of control he sounded. You sit here to face trial precisely because we keep

the law you break. It is you who are a hypocrite, and corrupt. You not only lie to us, you lie to yourself! Welling's anger blazed. Of course you could shoot us! he said, leaning forward. And you probably will! Just like you shot Magnus! Pitt stared at him, and realized with rising horror that Welling really was afraid. His words were not bravado; he believed them. He thought he was going to be murdered here. Pitt turned to Narraway, who addressed the prisoner. Magnus Landsborough was shot from behind, he said carefully. He fell forward, with his head towards the window. He wasn't shot from outside, Welling

responded. It was one of your people coming up from the back. As I said, as corrupt as hell itself. You've proved nothing, Pitt countered. And it's only just happened, so it could hardly be motive for bombing Myrdle Street. Why Myrdle Street, anyway? What did those people ever do to you? Or doesn't it matter who it is? Of course I don't have proof of corruption, Welling said bitterly, straightening his body again. You'll cover it up, just like you do all the rest. And you know why Myrdle Street. All the rest of what? Narraway asked him. He was standing elegantly, leaning against the wall, his thin body tense. He was not a big man. He was shorter than Pitt and much lighter, but there was a wiry strength in him. Welling considered before he replied. He

seemed to be weighing the risks against the values of talking. When he finally did, he still gave the impression of being in the grasp of anger rather than reason. Depends where you are and who you are, he said. What crimes you get caught for, and what gets overlooked if you put a little money the right way. He looked from one to the other of them. If you run a string of thieves, give a proportion of your take to the local police station and no one'll bother you. Have a shop or a business in certain places and you won't get robbed. Have it somewhere else and you will. His eyes were hot and angry, his body stiff. It was a massive charge he was making, hideous in its implications. Who told you all this? Narraway inquired. Told me?

Welling snapped back. The poor devils who are paying, of course. But I didn't expect you to believe me.

You've a vested interest in pretending not to. Ask around Smithfield, the Clerkenwell Road, and south to Newgate or Holborn. There are scores of alleys and back streets full of people who'd tell you the same. I'll not give you their names, or next thing they'll have to pay twice as much, or have the police all of a sudden find stolen goods in their houses. Narraway's face reflected open disbelief. Pitt did not know if it was real, or a mask put on precisely to provoke Welling to continue talking. Go ask Birdie Waters up the Mile End Road! Welling charged. But he's in the Coldbath Prison right now. Doing time for receiving, except he didn't even know he had the things. Silver, from a robbery in Belgravia. His voice hurt with rage. Birdie's never been to

Belgravia in his life. Are you saying the police put it there? Pitt interrupted whatever Narraway had been going to say. From the Hardcover edition. From Publishers Weekly. Carnage comes early in Perry's engrossing Victorian historical, the follow-up to *Seven Dials* (2003), when Special Branch investigator Thomas Pitt is summoned in the middle of the night to the aftermath of a bombing, the work of unknown anarchists intent on wreaking havoc in London in revenge for high-level police corruption. The chase leads to the group's lair in an abandoned building along grimy Long Spoon Lane, where the body of Magnus Landsborough, son of a

well-connected lord, raises disturbing questions about both the young man's association with the underground cell and police procedures to combat terrorists. Pitt and fellow detective Victor Narraway soon find themselves up against a powerful secret society known as the Inner Circle. True-to-life parliamentary debate ensues over how much power police should be granted to quash the anarchist threat to Queen and country. The action slows when myriad characters, including wives, servants and politicians, hold excessively detailed discussions of the case, but the pace picks up with a spirited pursuit through London and across the Thames. Perry manages to paint a convincing historical backdrop with echoes of modern-day

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