


# Half Moon Street: A Charlotte and Thomas Pitt Novel

*By Anne Perry*

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For Superintendent Thomas Pitt, the sight of the dead man riding the morning tide of the Thames is unforgettable. The corpse lies in a battered punt drifting through the early mist, clad in a torn green gown and bestrewn with flowers. Pitt’s determined search for answers to the victim’s identity leads him deep into London’s bohemia—to the theatre where beautiful Cecily Antrim is outraging society with her bold portrayal of a modern woman, and into studios where masters of light and shadow are experimenting with the fascinating new art of photography. But only Pitt’s masterly investigative skills enable him to identify the wildfire passions raging through this tragedy of good and evil, to hunt down the guilty and protect the innocent.

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**Half Moon Street: A Charlotte and Thomas Pitt Novel By Anne Perry Bibliography**

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## Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review
Secrets and lies, calumnies and evasions: in Anne Perry's Victorian mysteries, these elements, rather than a hat or gloves, a bustle or a watch fob, are the usual accoutrements of refined ladies and gentlemen. *Half Moon Street* marks the return of Inspector Thomas Pitt (20 novels now, beginning with *The Cater Street Hangman* and still going strong) to the cobblestoned streets and elegant drawing rooms of 19th-century London.

The inhabitants of those drawing rooms aren't usually thrilled to see him, because he always comes bearing bad news. This time, a body has turned up in a boat on the Thames: Delbert Cathcart, a talented portrait photographer with a taste for blackmail. Clad in a velvet dress, wrists manacled, legs spread grotesquely, skull crushed, Cathcart reminds Pitt of a perverse echo of the Lady of Shalott, or perhaps a debased Ophelia. Which of Cathcart's clients could have been pushed so far as to retaliate in such hideous fashion?

Pitt's official investigation is usually combined with another more idiosyncratic approach to the crime; this secondary analysis gives Perry free rein to dissect the manners and morals of Victorian society. In *Half Moon Street*, the genteel inquisition falls to Caroline Fielding, Charlotte's mother (Charlotte, who must need a bit of rest after so many outings, has been packed off to Paris for a vacation; her presence in the book is restricted to letters marveling, rather tediously, at the scandalous iniquities of the Moulin Rouge dance hall). Perry's readers will no doubt remember that Caroline scandalized society by marrying a much younger actor, Joshua. *Half Moon Street* introduces Caroline to his theatrical world, and to Cecily Antrim, a beautiful actress with liberal politics. Cecily poses both a personal and philosophical threat to Caroline, who is disturbed by her willingness to expose the realities of female sexuality on stage: "Should such things be said? Was there something indecent in the exposure of feelings so intimate? To know it herself was one thing, to realize that others also knew was quite different. It was being publicly naked rather than privately." This fear of exposure resonates through the worlds of theatrical and photographic art, as actors, diplomats, and genteel citizens race to hide their secrets from Pitt and Caroline.

While Perry evokes the London atmosphere with her usual skill, her narrative lacks its usual finesse. Rather than balancing Pitt's and Caroline's investigation, the novel lurches between them so that it seems all too often that Perry, in pursuit of one story, has forgotten the other. Additionally, Caroline's reaction to feminist politics and sexuality is inexplicably repetitive; her turgid expressions of horror seem the result of an overly eager copy-and-paste procedure. One hopes that this is a momentary lapse in an otherwise solid series. -- *Kelly Flynn*

From Publishers Weekly
Set in Oscar Wilde's London in 1891, Perry's new Thomas Pitt mystery is all about the importance of being earnest. Superintendent Pitt is summoned to the Thames when police discover the body of a young man dressed in a torn green velvet gown, manacled to a punt, "in parody of ecstasy and death." At first it seems the victim is Henri Bonnard, a functionary in the French embassy; eventually, Pitt and dour sidekick Sergeant Tellman identify the body as Delbert Cathcart, a gifted photographer. Was there a connection between Cathcart and lookalike Bonnard? Why was Cathcart's body arranged in that disturbing "feminine pose," which Perry repeatedly describes as a "mockery" of paintings of the Lady of Shallot and Ophelia? Meanwhile, Pitt's mother-in-law, Caroline Fielding, recently married to an actor 17 years her junior, blushes and stammers as her husband and his theater friends expound on Ibsen. While she's clarifying her views on

the irresponsibility of pornography, Caroline spends long hours entertaining Samuel Ellison, her late husband's American half-brother, who tearfully recounts his nation's history ("I watched the white man strengthen and the red man die"). For a grandma, Caroline is an oddly jejune character, and her moralistic musings overwhelm the mystery plot, which stagnates early on. What's clearly intended to be intellectually challenging comes across as silly and pretentious. There's even a pub scene in which Wilde himself witlessly pontificates, and "a pale young Irishman addressed by his fellows as Yeats, stare[s] moodily into the distance." 15-city author tour; audio rights to Random House Audio. (Apr..
- *moodily into the distance." 15-city author tour; audio rights to Random House Audio. (Apr.)*
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From Kirkus Reviews
Bereft for three weeks of his wife and children, Supt. Thomas Pitt is ripe for the potential international political scandal that looms when a manacled, bludgeoned male body is found in a punt on the Thames. The problem is that the mystery of the corpse tarted up in a torn green velvet dress and laid out like a parody of Millaiss painting of Ophelia doesnt seem to be large enough to hold Perrys attention span for much of the novel, even though the initial setup is intriguing enough. The body is first misidentified as missing French diplomat Henri Bonnard then discovered to be celebrated social photographer Delbert Cathcart. Perry does her usual handy job with the familiar details of Victoriana, including an engaging backstage scene with offstage cameos by Oscar Wilde and William Butler Yeats. But she spends more time with a melodramatic scandal that haunts Grandmama Mariah Ellisonand with bloated, anachronistic tracts on subjects from womens freedom (sexual and otherwise) to divorce laws to censorship in the arts to the demoralizing effects of nudie art postcardsthan she does in showing Pitt solving his crime. By the time the two stories dovetail in a rather too conveniently plotted resolution, the reader, weary from impassioned discussions of duty, honor, loyalty, longing, and loneliness, may not care who put the body in the punt. For fans of prolific Perry, a comfortably stalwart contribution to the Pitt canon (Bedford Square, 1999, etc.); others might be better served by starting earlier on. (Author tour) -- *Copyright ©2000, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

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**From reader reviews:**

**Lisa Haight:**

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