



Belgrave Square

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Anne Perry's BELGRAVE SQUARE is solidly in the tradition of books such as HIGHGATE RISE and SILENCE IN HANOVER CLOSE, in which she has demonstrated her mastery of the English drawing-room mystery. In this story, her two detectives (returnees from two earlier novels), Police Inspector Thomas Pitt and wife Charlotte, attempt to discover who blasted off the face of blackmailer-cum-moneylender William Weems with gold coins stuffed into a blunderbuss's barrel.

The first snag in the investigation comes when the Pitts find that the list of people who owed the deceased money is a long one indeed—and filled with plenty of suspects. As in any good drawing-room mystery, much is made of interior settings—especially those rooms where upper-crust Londoners transact business, settle disputes, and gossip. The Pitts, somewhat out of place in these circles, nevertheless manage to extract information from their social “betters,” but the information leads them on proverbial wild goose chases.

Thoroughly misled due to the machinations of two brilliant criminals, the reader readily shares the Pitts' bafflement over the murderer's identity, believing him or her to be first one character, then another. As a distinct plus, Perry provides readers with the sights and the sounds of fin de siecle London: its smoky alleys and illuminated ballrooms, and its obsessive chatter about the rich and famous, the Oscar Wildes and the Lord Randolph Churchills who gave many a gossip material galore.

As it turns out, this is a tale of homosexual love as well as of murder, a love (to paraphrase Wilde) that truly could not speak its name during Victoria's reign. By dealing with this once-taboo subject, Perry has written a nineteenth century mystery with a contemporary focus, one mirroring present-day concerns yet true to the stratified, claustrophobic society it attempts to portray. For these reasons and for its eminent readability, BELGRAVE SQUARE is a most entertaining and enlightening book.

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