

THE
THREAD
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PRESS

Agatha Panthus



DEATH COMES TO BROWNSTONE

A WENDELL CHANCE MYSTERY

Agatha Panthus

THE WENDELL CHANCE MYSTERIES



"I love the Wendell Chance Mysteries - they are so mysterious"

MAPPOWDER MYSTERIES MONTHLY

*"Give me an Agatha Panthus and a quarter of peanut brittle
and my life is complete"*

DORSET CONFECTIONERS WEEKLY

*"When it comes to plotting, character and scenic description
she has no clue - it's like nothing I have ever read"*

UNPRECEDENTED PLOTTING QUARTERLY

*"I love Golden Age Detective Fiction which is probably why I
struggled with this"*

GOLDEN AGE FICTION REVIEW

*"I knew Agatha well and this is quite possibly as good as she
gets"*

MRS AMANDA J THREADBONE

Agatha Panthus is the birthname of Agatha Panthus (DHRA founder member). Finding fame in her mid 30s with her novel *Death on the Style* [later recast by the author as the highly successful Ealing Broadway play *Murder on the Style*], she is the author of more than four crime fiction novels, several of which feature her handsome ex-War hero detective Wendell Chance.

Ms Panthus was married to anthropologist Professor Sir Sacheverel Mountebank for more than two decades and often accompanied him on his expeditions to East Africa. The couple returned from one of their many visits with a pet East African Pygmy whom they named Ptolemy. He was sometimes allowed to accompany them to social events and features as a character in more than one of her novels including the present volume.

Death Comes to Brownstone was her third novel and said to be her favourite. She and Sir Sacheverel lived in Pokesdown and Tarrant Rawston. She died in 1987 after ingesting a rogue Uncle Joe's Mintball given to her as a Christmas present by an impatient niece.

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AGATHA PANTHUS

DEATH COMES TO
BROWNSTONE



CHAPTER ONE

Toady Badghot replaced the stopper of the decanter with a satisfying clink. Placing a crystal tumbler to his over-indulged lips he savoured momentarily the peaty bitterness of the malt before issuing what appeared to be an exasperated sigh but which was in fact - to those who knew him - a clear indication that the minor aristocrat was thinking. And that - again for those who knew him - was a dangerous sign.

The appearance of Mildred - an over worked servant of longstanding - stilled his thoughts. *"How many will there be for lunch sir"* she asked with a meekness born of experience. *"Damned if I know"*, Toady replied heading once more for the small walnut table on which stood several half-filled decanters and glasses similar to the one he now held firmly in hand. *"You'd be better off asking her Ladyship or the blasted gardener for that matter"*. Mildred did not demur. *"But sir, if you don't mind, her Ladyship asked me to ask you"*.

"Well damn her eyes and damn yours if that's the case", he retorted dispeictfully. It was 11am and life at Brownstone Manor was running far from smoothly.



The small Soho flat was hardly big enough for a single girl let alone the two sisters whose chaotic lives it was currently required to sustain. Bobbie was perhaps the more organised of the two siblings in that she had arranged her half of the chest of draws with military precision (smalls in the bottom draw, jumpers in the middle and tops - appropriately enough - in the top; the few dresses she possessed hung precariously from the door frame). Tilly's attire was more scattered and items from it tended to be found more or less

wherever they had been discarded. If the dissimilar habits of the two sisters caused friction between them or blighted in any way the life they had chosen to forge together, then it was far from obvious this morning. As the sun streaming through the makeshift skylight in the sloping roof added a gay aspect to the otherwise shabby scene, Bobby's outstretched hand turned the face of the alarm clock towards her. It informed her in large Art Deco digits that it was already 11am. Perhaps last night's party at the *Espresso Bongo* had been a mistake Bobby mused as she realised that yet again she would be at least three hours late for work. Pimblington's Department Store on Oxford Street valued punctuality almost above customer service and Mr Knightsworth had already "*had a word*". Indeed only last week he had had several words and few of them had been complimentary. She was now on a final warning and today would almost certainly prove to be the last straw. "*Well it's an awfully boring job anyway*" Bobbie reassured herself. Listening to the constant complaints of well to do women with more money than sense; size 14s who insisted they were size 8s and that dresses had shrunk since the economies of the War when materials were scarce and generosity of design had all but disappeared was no fun. "*I hate them all*" she said with a vehemence which surprised even herself and caused her recumbent sister to stir - for she too had been spark out as a result of the late night revels so recently ended. "*Oh do stop shouting and put the kettle on ... there's a dear*", Tilly suggested in the sleepy tones of one not yet fully prepared for the day ahead. "*And whilst you're at it check if we still have a garibaldi or three in the jolly old biscuit tin. My fibroids are aching like billio*". It was 11.03 and life in Soho was running far from smoothly.



Jago Loungerat parked his open-topped Morgan outside the doors of *The Chameleon Company*'s Chetnole headquarters with the casual precision of one long-used to casually precise parking.

This had been his *modus operandi* for at least a decade and he was damned if he was going to change it just because Barksworth didn't approve. Barksworth was an idiot and a pedantic idiot at that. A dry old stick who had made his way from postboy to the top of Minor Accounts after more than three decades of unremarkable service, he was always trying to wrong-foot Jago; searching for ways of making him feel small when, as every secretary knew - or would soon discover - he was really quite big. In fact Jago was very big and in the right circumstances could be even bigger. Only last evening some girl he had met in Soho had made him stand out proudly when she had accidentally brushed by. He had told her he was going places and that if she played her cards right she could come too. She had liked that, he thought, had liked it very much indeed.

Jago's momentary reverie was abruptly halted by a call from an upper window. "*You really must stop parking with such casual precision young man*", the voice said, "*or I will have to report you to Mr Sinister Senior*". Barksworth! "*Right oh, Mr Barksworth*", he replied with an ironic sarcasm borne of innate linguistic sophistication and a rare grammatical facility. Only the smirk and ill-disguised two finger salute betrayed his true appreciation of Mr Bartksworth's untimely intervention!

As Jago entered the foyer, putting the same two fingers to his lips and kissing them before signalling the same to the pretty receptionist currently putting a Mr Easterborne from Corfe Mullen on hold whilst she tried to locate Peggy Mountfield Head of Recruitment (Peggy was in fact in the staff room placing her pro-biotic yoghurt in the staff frigidaire whilst catching up on the latest office gossip with Sabrina Walker-Peters and would not be available for a further 8 minutes). The receptionist - Eileen, Ellen, Edith? - blushed and smiled at Jago as he made for Lift No 2 and pressed the Up button with a determined yet casual precision equal

only to the casual precision of his casually precise parking manouevres. As the lift door opened and several people jostled to reposition themselves in order to effect an efficient panic-free exit when the time came to do so - Jago eased into his customary place and, finding button numer 6 unilluminated, now pressed it with the same determined precision that characterised all of his work-related, non-recreational, purposive actions. Behind him he could hear voices raised in what appeared to be an argument about the chances of *Fine Dancer* in the 3.15 at Uttoxeter. It was the same every Friday. Thank goodness he was going away for the weekend - to the country - to his uncle's place - Brownstone Manor. Why he might even contact the little filly he'd met in Soho last night and see if she fancied a spin and a few days in the countryside ...

Behind him the argument intensified. Would the going be firm or good to firm and might *Arabian Studmuffin* find the ground too difficult? Suddenly, the lift stopped mid floor. It was 11.15 am and business at The Camelion Company was running far from smoothly.

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The Cripplestyle-bound platform at Bradpole Station was unusually quiet. Ordinarily it was filled with jostling post rush-hour passengers eager to make the round trip to Cripplestyle for the Friday market at which they could avail themselves of all of the comestibles usually required for a family weekend: from Saturday breakfast to Sunday lunch with perhaps a little for afters in the form of a light Sunday tea or a left-overs Monday supper. Mandy Dakins was surprised, therefore, to find herself almost alone save for a young mother and her child and a strangely deformed East African pygmy in a bow tie and bright sequined shell suit. Assuming the latter to be a remnant of the recently departed circus, she dismissed the strange creature from her mind and concentrated

instead on the list she had drawn up of “*things to remember whilst in Cripplestyle*”. Her husband Alfred had been particularly solicitous in the list’s composition insisting that in addition to the obvious necessities she should call into Timothy White’s and Taylor’s and ask them specifically for “*a little something for the weekend*”. Mandy was unsure what precisely might be implied by the phrase but had been reassured by Alfred’s insistence that the pharmacist would know what exactly was required and would package it discreetly. Such confidence as she had gathered from this assurance was, however, somewhat undermined by his further insistence that she should on no account open the package before returning home or attempt to determine its content ‘*whilst on the train*’. All, he said, would be revealed in due course - another phrase which, accompanied as it was by an almost imperceptible moistening of the lips, struck the newly-wed as potentially ominous in its import.

Any misgivings Mandy may have had were soon forgotten, however, as a whistle blast rapidly followed by a large plume of black smoke rent the morning air and the 11.15 (locomotive SWR 3562) screeched to a noisy stop at the platform in front of her. Pausing to allow the egress of several Cripplestyle-bound passengers, she mounted the step into the second class compartment and, having located a vacant seat next to an elderly gentleman with a facial carbuncle the size of Mount Snowden (this fearsome excrescence at once accounting for the vacancy next to the gentleman whose face it so conspicuously disfigured), sat down. Mandy signed half-contentedly as she contemplated a pleasant morning’s shopping and allowed herself the thought of tea or coffee at the Market Square Café. Later she would remember the moment and marvel at her naiveté; her ridiculous belief that life could run as smoothly in reality as did in her imagination. For, unbeknownst to the newly-wed Mrs Dakins, forces were at work in the world that idyllic morning of which she had neither the knowledge nor the

intellect to comprehend. In the seat behind her the East African pygmy, belying his diminutive stature, expelled a fart of extravagant proportion and promordial force causing several war-affected passengers to dive instinctively for cover. They had hardly recovered their seats (a lesser anal eruption had seemed to signal the "*all clear*") when a station announcement informed them that there would be an indeterminate delay in their departure due to "*trouble on the line ahead*". It was 11.20am and the schedule of the South West Railway Line was running far from smoothly.



The Monte Carlyle Club's social secretary Horace Holywater tapped Wendell Chance on the arm, rousing the handsome sleuth from the light sleep into which he had slipped following a good meal and his third post-prandial brandy. "*What the devil...*" Wendell remarked before realising he was safely esconced before the fireside of his comfortable and seriously exclusive Mayfair Club and no longer in the damp rat-infested trench which had been his home for so long back in 1917. Even now the experience of that hell-hole infected his dreams - especially when he had enjoyed a good meal and three post-prandial brandies at comfortable and seriously exclusive Mayfair Club. Chance sat more upright, straightened his tie and, his senses recovered, glanced towards the door at which stood the prettiest ...

Now read on



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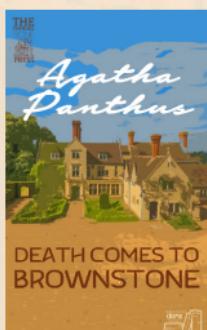
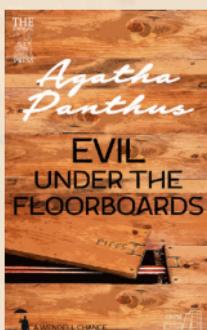
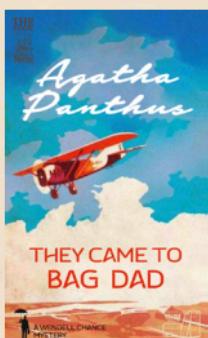
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