

Matthew Costello

Neil Richards

CHERRINGHAM

A COSY CRIME SERIES

Scared to Death



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Cherringham — A Cosy Crime Series

“Cherringham — A Cosy Crime Series” is a series made up of self-contained stories. The series is published in English as well as in German, and is only available in e-book form.

About the Book

When classic horror movie star Basil Coates becomes the victim of a series of scary pranks, the local police put it down to a crazed fan. Just pranks, after all ...

But with Halloween only days away, the spectre of murder suddenly visits the ghostly Coates mansion on the hill outside Cherringham — and Jack and Sarah find themselves caught in a mystery worthy of Basil's spookiest roles ...

Main Characters

Jack Brennan is a former NYPD homicide detective who lost his wife three years ago. Being retired, all he wants is peace and quiet. Which is what he hopes to find in the quiet town of Cherringham, UK. Living on a canal boat, he enjoys his solitude. But soon enough he discovers that something is missing — the challenge of solving crimes. Surprisingly, Cherringham can help him with that.

Sarah Edwards is a web designer who was living in London with her husband and two kids. Three years ago, he ran off with his sexy American boss, and Sarah's world fell apart. With her children she moved back to her home town, laid-back Cherringham. But the small town atmosphere is killing her all over again — nothing ever happens. At least, that's what she thinks until Jack enters her life and changes it for good or worse ...

The Authors

Matthew Costello (US-based) is the author of a number of successful novels, including *Vacation* (2011), *Home* (2014) and *Beneath Still Waters* (1989), which was adapted by Lionsgate as a major motion picture. He has written for The Disney Channel, BBC, SyFy and has also designed dozens of bestselling games including the critically acclaimed *The 7th Guest*, *Doom 3*, *Rage* and *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

Neil Richards has worked as a producer and writer in TV and film, creating scripts for BBC, Disney, and Channel 4, and earning numerous Bafta nominations along the way. He's also written script and story for over 20 video games including *The Da Vinci Code* and *Starship Titanic*, co-written with Douglas Adams, and consults around the world on digital storytelling.

His writing partnership with NYC-based Matt Costello goes back to the late 90's and the two have written many hours of TV together. *Cherringham* is their first crime fiction as co-writers.

Matthew Costello
Neil Richards

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1. A Scream in the Night

Maud Foy shivered as she made her way up the drive to what she called — whenever she talked about her job to her village friends — “that big old pile of bricks”.

Just ahead, Hill House — which its owners, Basil and Alyssia Coates called “the mansion” — looked like a gloomy and forbidding castle.

And on a chilly night like this — the sun in retreat early, with only a few days of October remaining — it definitely did *not* look like a mansion.

Not a desirable one, anyway.

Fallen leaves crunched under her feet as she approached the tall iron gate that led to the red-brick mansion, with its multiple pointy turrets and gabled windows.

Never catch me living here, thought Maud.

Not enough fireplaces in the damn thing to take the chill off on a night like this. Out here, perched on the edge of Winsham Rise, Hill House caught the worst of the bitter winds that swept through Cherringham in autumn and winter.

Much nicer to be in our little two-up two-down tucked away in the heart of the village, she thought.

She didn't mind the walk up from the lane — much easier to park her car down there than drive up, get out and pull the creaky metal gate open wide.

And that rattly old thing needed more than a few squirts of oil!

Like the house itself, so in need of repairs and modernisation.

Make more sense to just bulldoze the creepy place down.

Of course, she never voiced such opinions to Basil and Alyssia. For all they knew, Maud *loved* the place as much as they seemed to.

Though she suspected Alyssia, a good twenty years younger than Basil, would have preferred something smaller, more modern. One of those lovely villas they have in the sun-drenched hills of her native Italy.

Probably had her fill of English winters, poor woman!

Maud finally reached the tall iron gate. It must once have been locked and controlled from inside the house. But that too — no surprise — was no longer working.

An old intercom by the side did work, but Basil and Alyssia would be expecting her to come right in.

Five nights a week, save for the Saturday and Sunday.

Always returning after her own quick supper to prepare their evening tea, turn down their beds, and — these days — remind the ever-more forgetful and frail Basil to take his array of pills.

All things that Alyssia *should* have been able to handle. But both of them were trying to keep up appearances, with their minimal staff, trying to carry on as if they were ... what?

Lord and Lady of the manor?

Ridiculous, she thought.

She started to pull on one side of the black metal gate, its tall metal poles topped with bats.

Bats!

Typical Basil: wanting to remind everyone where his fame and one-time fortune came from.

Bats, monsters, ghouls and ghosts! All that nonsense seemed ridiculous when there were real horrors on the news, day in, day out.

She pulled open the gate and it creaked loudly.

Some bird, maybe a magpie, squawked back in response. Perhaps it thought another species had invaded its domain, eager to compete for the mice that roamed the gloomy red-brick building as if knowing that — someday! — it would be all theirs.

Maud slipped through the narrow gap, then pushed the gate closed behind her. Another ominous screech of metal echoed against the walls of the mansion.

She shivered in the cold night air.

She could hear a window creaking and banging somewhere high up.

Even after all these years, the place still gave her the creeps.

She hurried up the path and climbed the crumbling stone steps that led up to the oak doors of the mansion.

*

As usual, she didn't knock — just pushed at the unlocked door and went in.

She wondered — did they even lock the door in the evening after she left?

Perhaps they didn't care.

As far as she could see, there wasn't much worth nicking inside. Whole place just stuffed with silly rubbish from Basil's old films.

Dust traps most of it — and who was the muggins whose job it was to clean up that dust?

With Basil, the perfectionist, looking on ...

Yes, Maud Foy!

She hurried inside, into the big hallway with its minstrel gallery and old pictures.

She peeled off her raincoat and shivered again.

Although she was now sheltered from the wind whipping around outside — it wasn't much warmer in the house.

This little nightly chore would get even more difficult, more chilling, when autumn gave way to winter.

Maybe it was time to look around for another job?

But then, how many times had she thought that?

And each time, Basil — always with that smile, his face so animated, showing why he had indeed been such a big movie star — would put an arm around her, and say “Maud — dear, dear Maud — our loyal and trusted servant.”

Then a touch to her cheek — itself feeling a bit much, even a bit *cheeky*.

“When the time comes, you won’t be forgotten. Of course ...”

And with that *lure*, Maud had found it hard to leave. Would Basil indeed remember her in his will? A little something; maybe more than a little something?

A girl can dream, can’t she?

Perhaps there’d be enough to make that dream come true. A tidy little cottage in Spain, perhaps?

Hear they’re going dirt cheap these days, she thought.

So she stayed. Smiled. Fulfilled her duties as housekeeper-cum-cook ... though Alyssia sometimes fancied herself in that latter department, leaving the out-of-date kitchen an absolute mess while preparing her *Bucatini Pomodoro*!

Maud hung her coat on the rack by the door, near the wellingtons, umbrellas, and spare macs, all at the ready for guests and visitors.

In recent years — hardly any of them, that was for sure.

Though, this last month, the house had been busier than usual. What with the prodigal daughter — Karina — back from her catwalks in New York, seemingly for good.

Catwalks. Very appropriate.

Get her upset, and Karina did indeed have claws.

And that funny journalist bloke, lurking around the place, always watching her, his feet never making a sound,