

Matthew Costello

Neil Richards

# CHERRINGHAM

A COSY CRIME SERIES

## Playing Dead



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# **Cherringham — A Cosy Crime Series**

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



## 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.

## Main Characters

**Jack Brennan** is a former NYPD homicide detective who lost his wife a year 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. Two 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 ...

Matthew Costello  
Neil Richards

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**Playing Dead**



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# 1. All The World's a Stage

Getting into the deserted theatre had been easy. The alleyway at the back couldn't be seen from the High Street and the rubbish bins made for an easy step-up. The new dressing room windows hadn't shut properly since they'd been installed.

All he needed was a screwdriver to flip the catch and — *click* — the window opened easily.

He eased his legs over the window-sill and jumped down.

He was in.

He stood perfectly still in the darkness, not breathing, just listening to the old building.

Nothing.

He was alone.

He took out his pencil torch, flicked it on and checked his watch: 10 p.m. Rehearsals had finished at nine. Nobody would be coming back into the building at this hour. By now they were all in the Angel across the road, well into their second pints.

As long as he didn't make a noise, he could do what he had to do and be home by ten thirty. Maybe he'd even have time to pop innocently into the pub for a swift half himself...

He slipped out of the dressing room into the corridor. Somehow at night, the smell of new paint in here seemed stronger.

He hardly needed the torch. Even with the recent renovations, he knew the layout of the rooms and corridors so well. Two fire doors — then the set of stairs — and now, here he was...



In the auditorium, just below the apron.

He flicked the torch around the space. Pristine rows of new seats, sloping up to the rear of the theatre until they were lost under the balcony. High windows at the sides, letting in a faint orange glow from the street lights outside.

He could see the fire exit signs glowing softly green. And up above, the Victorian stucco work; spotless. Cherubs playing harps, the gods of theatre drinking wine and looking jovially down.

*Wasn't like this when I was a kid.*

He thought back to all those Saturday mornings sitting in here with his other Cherringham mates, watching films on the rickety old screen, throwing popcorn around, shouting, mucking about.

Watching the older kids snogging in the back row...

God, the place stank then. But now, with all that Lottery money thrown at it, the whole place ripped out and refurbished — the Cherringham Little Theatre was a building to be proud of.

Rebuilt inside and out with all the latest digital sound equipment and lights. A full schedule of music, comedy and theatre lined up well into next Spring.

And of course the Players, Cherringham's very own amateur dramatic company, in residence with three productions planned for the inaugural year.

Shame the pompous idiots who ran the company couldn't make better decisions. Couldn't judge people.

Didn't understand *feelings*.

His anger welled up again, but he calmed himself, took a deep breath.

No need to be angry. He was going to fix things, wasn't he?

That's why he was here.

He climbed the three steps on to the stage and slipped through the black drapes into the wings. Back here, he

really did need the torch. Not a chink in the curtains for any light to get in.

He shone his torch up into the rigging above the stage.

He could see the thick metal bar which ran stage left to stage right. Various lanterns and spotlights hung down from it. Chains and ropes curled away from the bar towards the back of the stage, behind the scenery.

He knew from experience how heavy the lanterns and spots were. It was a two-man job setting up the lighting rig and safety was a constant mantra.

You didn't want a light slipping from up there and dropping on to the stage. Especially during a performance. Crowded stage, actors below, concentrating on performance, listening for cues. Last thing they'd do would be to think of looking up — even if they heard a noise.

Five kilos — maybe ten — of sharp-edged metal, falling twenty feet.

*That would hurt.*

*No.* Would do more than hurt.

Could *kill*.

On a whim, he stepped out on to the stage again and sank down on one knee, facing the invisible audience.

"If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well. It were done quickly," he said, his voice seeming to fill the theatre.

He couldn't remember the rest of the speech.

He got up and checked that he still had the spanner nestled in his pocket. Then he headed over to the steel ladder on the side wall, put the torch in his mouth and started to climb up into the lighting rig...

*I would have killed in that part,* he thought.