

Matthew Costello

Neil Richards

CHERRINGHAM

A COSY CRIME SERIES

Murder by Moonlight



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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 ...

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Written by Matthew Costello and Neil Richards

Edited by Victoria Pepe

Project management: Sarah Pelekies

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1. The Rehearsal

Kirsty Kimball had to ask herself: *had joining the Rotary really been a good idea?*

One of the duties of a loyal Rotarian was to appear here, in this draughty room above the Village Hall, to rehearse for *the* big event of the upcoming holiday season, which is why Kirsty was standing here looking at lyrics and wishing she was at home.

The “big event”, that is, according to the long-time Rotarians who ran the organization, was The Christmas Lights of Cherringham, an evening fête that was supposedly good for local businesses, as well as being good for the village to see the various shop owners and local professionals, standing cheek to jowl, howling out bars of holiday classics.

There are better things to do with my evenings, Kirsty thought, thinking that standing here was almost insufferable.

“Ms Kimball — if you wouldn’t mind, eyes up here, if you will. We really can’t have people singing into their books.”

Kirsty wasn’t sure that *The Almighty*, Roger Reed — whose day job was managing the Greenwood Commercial Bank — did a very good job at smoothing things out here.

She shot him a nod and a smile, duly chagrined, and dutifully kept her eyes on Reed as he waved his arms like Mickey Mouse leading an army of brooms.

Yes, she thought. *Maybe time to drop out of this organization, get her Thursday nights back again ...*

Though in these tricky times, she should be doing all she could to help her little gift shop, The Knick Knack, keep its head above water, and you could never tell how doing this

might help. As the others never tired of reminding her — the unspoken bond of the Rotary is *always* to direct relevant commercial enquires to a fellow member.

One hand washing the other — isn't that what they called it?

That was the goal anyway ... along with staging a few charitable events, and the big Christmas concert in the village square.

She shivered and looked around her fellow singers. All had winter coats. Most wore hats. Nobody looked particularly happy. The dismal brown-floored room above the library had ancient cast-iron radiators but the village hall committee had decreed they should only be turned on when the temperature threatened freezing-point.

She thought of her snug little cottage, the wood-burner glowing cheerily, her supper in the slow-cooker ...

Then she heard someone over in the basses belch trying to hit the first note of "We Three Kings".

Lord ...

Barrel-chested Pete Bull, proprietor of Bull Plumbing, standing next to smarmy Simon Rochester, CEO of a financial thingamajig of some sort.

What exactly did he do? She'd never quite worked it out. She always thought it odd when someone explained what they did for a living, and afterwards you still didn't have a bloody clue.

Rochester had told her before how he felt "compelled" to perform this local service. Otherwise, Kirsty couldn't imagine why on earth he would deign to stand next to Pete Bull as if they were actually mates, toiling together in the commercial trenches of the Cherringham economy.

And as if she could feel his eyes, Kirsty quickly redirected her gaze to the front, just catching the ever hawk-eyed Roger Reed about to fire another withering glare her way.

Kirsty smiled as she sang as if to say, *see, I'm looking at you!* Roger seemed to smile back. But then Kirsty realized the smile was aimed at her fellow soprano Emma Hilloc, standing beside her, singing as usual just a quarter tone flatter than the rest of the choir. Another reason to reconsider whether she really belonged here ...

Anyway — a few more carols, and they'd finally break for the night.

And that thought really made Kirsty smile.

Kirsty had gone to recover her coat and bag from the little cloakroom at the back which was filled with the smell of mothballs and the dry wood of the old building and where finding one's things at the end of the rehearsal was a game of hide-and-seek.

When she spun around, ready to make her exit, she faced Martha Bernard, the choir's pianist.

Though retired from full-time work, Martha remained active in the Rotary, loyally organizing the snacks for each session: tonight's were multiple iterations of biscuits, cakes and the obligatory weak tea, and Martha was hoping to escape unnoticed.

"Running away so fast, Kirsty?"

Kirsty fixed a smile to her face.

"No, Martha. Just getting ready for my walk home. I'm snowed under with work right now. Orders for Christmas, you know ..."

Not true, and Kirsty felt that Martha could see that.

"You young business women! Always bustling about. It's a different world from my day. As you know."

Martha stood leaning on her walking stick. In her other hand she held a plate piled high with biscuits as if it might anchor Kirsty and prevent her quick dash away.

"Can't I tempt you? Got your favourite. Oatmeal raisin."

Kirsty looked at the plate, chocolate chips side by side with what indeed looked like yummy, crunchy oatmeal